

Pushing at the Limits

Reconstructing Cross-Cultural Exchange in Education

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Abstract

Cross-cultural exchange between individuals, both through face-to-face encounter and, more recently, electronic media, has been widely promoted as a means of educating against prejudice. Through the integration of structured field study, practical experience, educational and social theory, and contemporary philosophy, this thesis challenges the very foundations upon which such initiatives are built, and develops an alternative basis from which to approach cross-cultural exchange.

An exploration of social categorisation posits the foundations of prejudice in essentialist conceptualisations, whether under the umbrella of universalism or relativism. The historical propensity for antiracist and multicultural education to reify group difference and reinforce such essentialist conceptualisations of identity thus presents an interesting conundrum. The fact that similar tendencies are noted in contemporary practice, educational resources, and official guidance, gives this more than an academic interest.

Despite the apparent advantages of abandoning essentialist categorisations, studies of communication and identity formation reveal contradictory evidence - the need to locate others socially and to predict their behaviour accordingly, both in face-to-face and electronic communication. Thus, the challenge for educators is to develop innovative pedagogical approaches that translate contemporary, non-essentialist, understandings of group categorisation into workable practices to overcome inequality. While, within such a programme, cross-cultural exchange might be seen to have a valuable role to play alongside structural reform, it is clear that alone it cannot provide a panacea for prejudice.

In the light of the above, the thesis addresses guidance for good practice in cross-cultural exchange, and the related complexity of programme evaluation, alongside the training of future facilitators of such projects. A particular emphasis is placed upon the use of participatory arts and the unique tools this medium can bring to inclusive, cross-cultural collaboration. The thesis demonstrates, that cross-cultural exchange has the potential to provide valuable and significant learning experiences, some of which have previously been given little recognition.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The story of this thesis is one of challenging false dichotomies, and of rising to the challenge, set by Gitlin and Russell (1994), of working simultaneously at a theoretical level and within the community. My research has been a dialogue between theory and experience. Understandings have developed in a spiralling fashion through a process of revisiting the two. Punch (1986) proposes that researchers should clarify the motivation for a study in terms of an intellectual autobiography, as opposed to what he claims are the spurious theoretical justifications of some research. It is with this in mind that I begin by displaying something of the narrative of the origins of my thesis. This is intended as a means of exploring intellectual insight and development, enhancing the depth and richness of the study, and making explicit the links between motivations, methods and the topic of enquiry and the research outcomes.

I feel it is a necessary introduction to the study to illustrate the journey that led to its conception. Thus, I begin by demonstrating how my initial fieldwork project brought about a complete refocusing of the research. This, I show, was largely a consequence of being forced to question the methodological and pedagogical assumptions upon which it was based. As I demonstrate, the methodology and, indeed, the topic of research presented below have been strongly influenced by these experiences.

Having offered some insight into the origins and aims of the study, I introduce the key research questions it addresses. In order to establish the approach

adopted, I go on to lay the theoretical foundations on which the ensuing study is built. For example, I address complex debates surrounding what have been termed “racial” and/or “ethnic” categorisations, navigating my way through by analysis on both terminological and conceptual levels. The chapter is concluded with an overview of the issues that will be addressed throughout the thesis, and a summary of the main conclusions reached.

As I stated above, I begin with a narrative – a demonstration of how I arrived at a study of educational practice in cross-cultural exchange.

The foundations of the study

The initial aim was to undertake a piece of comparative work examining which factors are significant in determining children’s understanding of the concept of nation or national identity, and to question whether these constructions are context specific or universal. I intended to establish the similarities and differences between the ways in which children in various cities, towns and villages in England and in Bosnia-Herzegovina constructed their own national identities.

Methods

Inspired by past research into children and young people’s understandings of national identity, I initially considered the use of interviews as a means of data collection. For example, Carrington and Short in their British and American studies (see Carrington and Short 1995, 1996 and 2000) make use of semi-structured interviews as a means of exploring variations in children’s

conceptions of national identity. However, upon further reflection, I reached the conclusion that interviews would be an unsuitable tool in the context of my research. I now justify my reasons for abandoning this approach, as it is this choice that led me to a methodology that resulted in a radical alteration to the topic of my research.

- First, I was concerned at the potential this kind of survey has to influence participants, particularly that it may generate or perpetuate sentiments of nationalism or national belonging - an ethical dimension enhanced by the knowledge that the subjects of my study would be children.
- In terms of the quality of the data gathered, I felt that the understandings I was seeking were quite possibly previously unarticulated and unlikely to be best revealed by direct questioning.
- Finally, I was led away from this methodology by the knowledge that language barriers and the heightened sensitivity of issues related to nationalism in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) would augment the concerns expressed above.

Underlying and perhaps encompassing all this was a determination that my project should not in any way be exploitative. I share the belief of Hanrahan et al (1999) of the importance of the methods adopted for a study.

For me, the search for a research method that was congruent with my intellectual and ethical beliefs was as important as finding a topic worthy of investigation. (ibid., p.407)

In this vein, I was guided by a need to give something back in the short term to those people with whom I would be working; over and above any supposed more general long-term gains. I had heard too many stories of “internationals” swooping in like vultures on Bosnia-Herzegovina (and many other places) taking – “our” photographs, “our” stories, “our” women; profiting from others' misfortune, before hurrying away to glean from the next disaster. I was interested in developing friendships and in establishing a relationship with a place that had inspired me as much as its people. This is the context in which the initial fieldwork arose.

The actual approach I adopted was as follows. I planned to establish partnerships between children in schools in England and BiH. Initially, I was to work in each of the schools creating with each group a portfolio as a means of introducing themselves to their partners. I planned two principal sources of data by which to gain an insight into their understandings of identity:

- the portfolios - created by the groups (with individual contributions) with the potential to contain any/all of the following: photographs, letters, drawings, audio cassette recordings, small objects
- field notes - taken over the course of a programme of work in which groups were introduced to their partners/ their partners' locality, and in which the portfolios were created

The emphasis made in introducing the portfolios was on "what things about yourself and the place you come from would you tell/show to other people who come from a far away place who know nothing about you and the place

you come from?". I was interested in establishing which aspects of their own identity seemed important to them in this context.

Connections between young people in eight schools, four in North East England and four from across BiH, were established. The members of the youngest group were 7 and 8 years old and the oldest were 16 and 17. Over three hundred young people were involved in the project, though less contributed to the portfolios.

Challenges to assumptions

In the middle of this fieldwork project, I spent forty days in BiH establishing school connections. It was during this period of work that I began to ask fundamental questions about the nature of my fieldwork and its underlying assumptions. I had perceived the focus upon cross-cultural contact as unproblematic. I saw it as a reasonably neutral and unthreatening way of gathering potentially sensitive data, and as a means of giving something back to the research participants (a bit of fun if nothing else).

There were two aspects which forced me to reassess my assumptions. First, living, working and socialising in this unfamiliar context, challenged my assumptions about cross-cultural contact; secondly, fieldwork data revealed the limited *expression* of national or ethnic consciousness. I explore both in turn.

Cross-cultural contact

Ten years of experience as a committed and energetic participant and organiser of international projects of varying scales, coupled with my generally “liberal humanist” worldview, had engrained in me a belief in the value of international friendship and co-operation. Although I would have considered it absurd to believe that cross-cultural exchanges would bring peace to the world, I did think they might contribute to its becoming a more harmonious place. Effectively, though I had no name for it, I (alongside many others committed to cross-cultural exchanges) was a proponent of the *contact hypothesis*¹.

This hypothesis holds that contact, particularly close and sustained contact, with members of different racial and ethnic groups promotes positive, tolerant attitudes toward those groups. (Powers and Ellison, 1995, p.205)

Whilst in BiH my belief in the positive value of cross-cultural contact was challenged continuously, and, as I began to recognise this, past experiences flooded my head as further fuel to my unwanted, newly found convictions. This triggered a critique of cross-cultural exchange that, as I explore in Chapter 4, has challenged the contact hypothesis at a fundamental level. At this point in time, my ideas were challenged on three levels, as I now go on to describe.

First, in conversation with people who had participated in a project in England, I began to consider the potential for exchanges to create damaging

¹ Chapter 4 gives an in-depth critical analysis of the hypothesis to which I refer briefly here.

experiences for participants. I identified two ways in which this appeared to be so: first, by creating an idealised experience that would remain inaccessible in the future, and by the associated problems of feeling newly isolated on returning to the home community. Secondly, through observing the resentment felt by many local people towards the “internationals” (often perceived as interested only in profiting from others’ misfortune), I was forced to consider the possible dangers of negative contact.

The second manner in which I felt my ideas about contact were challenged was in relation to an observed lack of correlation between the interpersonal and the intergroup. However positive the contact experience, I realised I was witnessing numerous instances of interpersonal tolerance or friendship across a national/cultural/ethnic divide, that was not extended to challenge negative opinions of “the Muslims” or “the Serbs” or “the Croats” or “the people from the North” or “the peasants” as groups.

Finally, I perceived contact to be relatively insignificant in influencing opinion. As I questioned these ideas, I became aware of the extent to which people are influenced by things other than their personal experience. This was brought home to me by one event in particular. Prior to elections, the nationalist Croatian political party (HDZ), fearing a decline in popularity, spent 3.5 million Deutsch Marks² of local government money on a fantastic display of fireworks and national prowess. Consequently, opinion swung. The

² At that time a typical basic wage for a bar worker in the same city was 15DM per shift

consequential failure to pay wages to those employed by local government could not counter this - I was astonished to learn of individuals left unpaid yet changing their views in favour of the HDZ who won overwhelming support.

Fieldwork data

A clear trend was also emerging in the way in which the children and young people I was working with were choosing to represent themselves. The emphasis was very much on the personal. The fact that national sentiment is not articulated, clearly does not prove that its salience is limited, but does suggest its relative insignificance in this context.

Small-group work with 7 and 8 year olds in England, as a part of the school-linking project described above, demonstrates this clearly. The children were asked to think about what they would like to tell children in a far-away city about themselves and the place they come from. There was a clear trend in the kind of information they wanted to share, and the overwhelming majority of it was personal: *our names, our age and birthday, our address, about our school, our hobbies, what we eat, my favourite thing*. Only three comments could in any way be related to “nationality”, “ethnicity” or associated concepts: *how we talk; our country; and what we look like - our colouring, our eyes*. These were far outweighed by such recommendations as: *door number; door colour; what I wear to school; if we’re nice and kind or naughty; where the swings are; and invite them to a party*.

This emphasis on the personal did not appear to be a reflection of age, even among the older groups the focus was on such things as age, hobbies, friends, families, school and personal preferences.

This extract from a letter written by sixteen year old Igor³ is a fair reflection of the kind of information shared:

I live with my brother and sister (who are younger than me), and my mother and father. I enjoy reading, writing poetry and listening to pop music. I'm very fond of the countryside, and I like school, friends and girls. I love the countryside and very often my friends and I go for days out in the country. As I'm a student at the High school, I've joined a youth theatre - the High School Club. In it, everyone gets given different jobs: some are journalists, some are actors, dancers, musicians, etc. I'm into acting [...] I don't know who you are or where you live, please write back to me so that we can get to know each other. Please tell me as much as you can about yourself so I can get to know you as well as possible.

Exploring motivation to find a new focus for the research

This first attempt at fieldwork was a key learning experience that pushed me to make significant and radical alterations to my thesis; for I was not able to ignore my suspicions and cynically write a report that did not do justice to the way I perceived things. The challenges this brought left me struggling to find a direction in which to continue, forcing me to remind myself of my motivations for undertaking the research. Through this reflection, I was able to use the elements of the work most important to me as a means of directing my learning and the development of the research project.

³ This is a pseudonym. Chapter 2 offers a discussion of anonymity and the use of pseudonyms.

I arrived at four key personal motivations of equal priority (see Straker and Hall, 1999):

- the project must be personally challenging
- the participants must be respected
- the project must have some positive outcome
- the reporting of the research must be true to the experience

Through exploring my motivation I was able to use my fieldwork experience to redirect my study and, as I will expand upon in Chapter 2, make what had been my unacknowledged assumptions the focus of my future work. It was in the light of the above experiences that I returned to the educational literature and consequently reformulated the research.

Introducing the subject of enquiry

The research addresses one key matter: *What constitutes good practice in cross-cultural exchange?* This is a deceptively simple question, but one which, I argue, demands a deep and far-reaching enquiry if it is to be satisfactorily answered. In the course of my broad-ranging enquiry I seek answers to the following:

- How, if at all, can cross-cultural exchange be used as a means of overcoming prejudice?
- Which conceptual framework(s) enable good practice in cross-cultural exchange? And, conversely, which undermine it?

- How can good practice be evaluated?
- What kind of guidance for good practice can be provided?
- Are there any personal and/or social benefits to be gained from cross-cultural exchange?

The investigation encompasses an exploration of problems and critiques of past practice; challenging discussions of contemporary philosophical, social, and educational theory; presentation of the results of structured field study; and reflections upon personal practical experience.

The outcome is not a recipe for success nor a panacea for prejudice, for which I make no apology. What I aim to have done is to engage with theory while avoiding the associated obscurity that can threaten practical action. As such the study integrates the theory and practice of cross-cultural exchange as a means of providing a concrete approach to tackling a real problem.

Prior to revealing how the thesis unfolds and how the above aims are realised, I begin by introducing some key conceptual issues through a consideration of the terminology related to this area.

Categories and concepts

How is "ethnicity" to be consistently and usefully distinguished from "race", and "ethnocentrism" from "racism", and both of these from "xenophobia" and "nationalism"? (Rattansi, 1999, p.79)

Rattansi poses this deceptively simple question in an effort to expose the inherently problematic nature of such concepts. Purely in terms of the meaning attached, definitions of the above terms are both transient and

intertwined, he states. They are, as I demonstrate, often switched between, used as synonymous or used inconsistently. Such is the complexity of the situation that (at least in the case of “nation”) any generic definition is likely to be too broad to be of analytical use, and any narrow definition verges on the purely descriptive (Jenkins, 1997).

the entire idea of such communities is hard to pin down, and often artificial, or at least deliberately created. If, in addition, nationality is to be different from ethnicity, and not to be given simply a positive law definition, most concepts built on it are extremely difficult to define, and can seem ultimately vacuous. (Robertson, 1985, p.226)

As the above quote from the *Penguin Dictionary of Politics* indicates, the problems of social categorisation are not merely a matter of terminology. This necessitates an investigation of the frameworks in which these categories are conceptualised. Below, I define essentialist, and non-essentialist interpretations of categories and explore some of the surrounding debates. I conclude by arguing that an understanding on a conceptual level is necessary for the development of an effective approach to intercultural learning.

Terminology

It is commonly regarded as good practice to begin a study with some conceptual ground-clearance and to provide definitions of the key terms around which the study evolves. However, it is more my concern to problematise such categories as “race”, “nation”, “nation-state”, “ethnicity”, “culture” and “citizenship”, and to raise conceptual questions. To attach a clear definition to any of these terms appears both impossible and undesirable. I demonstrate this, first through considering the complexity of

issues raised on the level of the semantic, and then in terms of the categorisation process itself. I then illustrate the issues raised through a practical example prior to explaining how I have come to adopt the terms used throughout the study.

Synonymy

“The people”, “our people” are words we use to differentiate ourselves on the basis of culture and to denote a sense of belonging. With the same intent we might use tribe, community, religious tradition, or “tongue”. (Cockburn, 1998, p. 35)

The first hurdle to cross in seeking an understanding of any of the deluge of terms used to label the segments into which we divide humanity, is that they are often used interchangeably or as though synonymous. This difficulty is augmented by the fact that (if any definition at all is attempted) they are frequently defined in terms of each other. This leads us to have “nation” defined in terms of “ethnicity”:

The “nation” and “national identity” or “nationality” are, respectively, varieties of ethnic collectivity and ethnicity. (Jenkins, 1997, p.143)

which, in turn, can be related to “race” and “culture”:

Ethnicity refers to a sometimes rather complex combination of, racial, cultural, and historical characteristics by which societies are occasionally divided into separate, and probably hostile, political families. (Robertson, 1985, p.111)

Gellner (1997) completes the circle, through defining nation in terms of shared culture. It would be surprising if people were not uncertain of the meaning of these terms and their relationship to one another.

The term “ethnicity” illustrates the confusion clearly. The origins of the word lie in the Greek *ethnos*, commonly translated as “people” or “nation” (Jenkins,

1997), and often used as a euphemism for “race”, or viewed as synonymous with it (Ratcliffe, 1994; Bonnett, 2000). This latter trend can be noted in everyday interaction, as people, apparently afraid to use the term “black”, aim for political correctness through describing certain “types” of people as “ethnic”. Such use of this term fails, it appears, to recognise that all humans are ethnic. A further danger arises from an assumption implicit in this, that “white” – the “unproblematic” ethnic majority - is a norm from which “black” deviates.

As I have demonstrated, even on the level of terminology, it is certainly not easy, and quite likely not possible, to reach any conclusive definitions. The fact that definitions of these societal divisions seem inherently problematic suggests to me a complexity that lies deeper than the semantic.

Concepts

Social categorisation is commonly talked about in relation to *essentialism*. This refers to the conceptual framework within which categorisation takes place. Here, I begin by introducing essentialism, before exploring why there is a tendency for contemporary scholars to veer away from essentialist conceptualisations.

Essentialism

Essentialism is a term to which various meanings have been attributed over time. In its ancient Greek origins it relates to the existence of abstract entities (Plato’s Forms) of which all things experienced in the sensible world are mere

imperfect copies. As contemporarily interpreted in the *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Yablo, 2000), 'The essential properties of a thing are the ones it needs to possess to be the thing it is.' (p.254) i.e. its defining features. In relation to social categorisation, I feel the definition the encyclopedia goes on to provide is particularly pertinent:

A further approach conceives the essential properties of x as those which underlie and account for the bulk of its other properties. (p.254).

This is at the foundation of the understanding that humanity is subdivided into predetermined or "given" categories; pre-existent divisions, defined by essential features, to which labels are merely attached. As I explore in Chapter 3, early multicultural education appears firmly founded in such an understanding. Allport (1954) in his pioneering study advocated the need for scientific research to uncover the "real" group differences in order that education could strive to replace falsehoods with fact. Such an *essentialist* interpretation of social categories, with its tendency to homogenise groups and reify difference, has huge appeal to "common sense" (Jones, 1997).

Despite its appeal, essentialism has long been subject to challenges. As I demonstrate below, the rigidity of essentialist categorisations appears to bear little resemblance to reality.

Challenges to essentialism

people's ways of defining themselves vary in time and place (Grant, 1997, p.13)

The above statement exposes a new dimension to the complexity of definition formation. Categories of membership have a meaning dependent on space

and time, both in terms of the general socio-political backdrop as well as in terms of the intricacies of a specific encounter. To have an identity is to be placed in a category with culturally specific ascribed features (Cockburn, 1998; McCarthy, 1990).

Identities are constructed; they are made not given. Individuals grow into who they are and they develop a set of values which guide the ethical and moral decisions they take as a consequence of experience, learning and interpretation of living and working within their social world. Identity grows through the critical exposure to the diverse and complementary traditions, heritages and values of society in their various forms. (Crawford, 1996, p.217)

Thus, the meaning attached to terms and the salience of a particular category are, in contrast to an essentialist understanding, variable. Below, I identify three dimensions to this: temporal, individual and geographical.

Temporal transience

the historical record indicates that ethnic identity is not an inert and stable object. It has over the centuries, proved to be highly plastic and fluid, and subject to far-reaching changes and revolutions. (Kedourie, 1993, p. 141).

Social categorisations alter with time and as a reflection of societal change. In the nineteenth century “race” appeared to be a favoured term (Jones, 1997) and one that embraced categories that might now be categorised as “national”, “cultural” or “linguistic”.

The collapse of the “scientific” basis of “race” in the latter half of the twentieth century (Bonnett, 2000) can be related to a decline in this term. Latterly, Cockburn (1998) claims, the term favoured by academia and the media is “ethnic group”, this is supported by Jones (1997) who reports on the

accelerated growth in the study of ethnicity and claims that the shift in terminology also marked an alteration in our conceptualisation.

Individual transience

I would prefer to argue that identities are multiple and fluid or “negotiable” and that the same individual or group may privilege one identity over another according to the situation and the moment. (Burke, 1992, p. 305).

An individual's self-categorisation is also neither fixed nor stable. Particular aspects of an individual's identity take on different degrees of significance depending upon the immediate context (Rattansi, 1999). Also, it is increasingly common to perceive individuals as holding multiple identities, and as mobile between two or more cultures (Grant, 1997).

While complex multi-layered notions of identity are commonly perceived to stand in direct contradiction of essentialism, the concept of multiple identities does not necessarily do so. It should be borne in mind that it is the *process* of categorisation that is significant, rather than the number of categories to which any one person is affiliated.

We need to remember that identity is decentered, fractured and fragmented rather than multiple. The notion of multiple identities implies some kind of mythologized, transcendentalized essence. I prefer to see identity as fluid rather than stable, as differentiated rather than passively complete as in some nativist essence of oceanic wholeness. (McLaren, 1999, p.196)

Such a decentred or fragmented identity relates to issues raised in Chapter 4. There it is argued that, in any given instant, individuals will both define themselves and be defined by others (consciously or unconsciously) as a complex blend of many aspects of their identities.

Geographical transience

Almost anything can be used to set up "ethnic" divisions (Robertson, 1985, p.112)

Further to undermine a stable, predetermined essentialist conceptualisation process, the meaning that terms hold and the basis of their definition is variable over geographical location. For example, *The Penguin Dictionary of Politics* hedges around a definition of "nation" on the grounds that all criteria that might be set out are invariably false in any set of examples. "Ethnic", "racial", "religious" or "linguistic" divisions all fail the test.

Alternatives to essentialism

Clearly, essentialism is not a conceptualisation favoured by all. Benedict Anderson's (1994)⁴ *Imagined communities*, is a landmark in the increasing tendency to support more contingent, *non-essentialist*, understandings of social categorisation. He defines the nation as 'an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.' (p.6). This seems to be the basis from which most theorists now work. It is widely accepted that social categories are socially constructed rather than essentially derived (Jones, 1997).

There is no a priori reason why people should be divided into races: it is only as a result of social processes that they become racially labelled. (Reicher, 1986, p.154)

⁴ first published in 1983

This is an understanding endorsed by those subscribing to what is commonly termed postmodern or poststructuralist theory. Rattansi (1999) is adamant that social categories should be viewed in such a *non-essentialist* framework. Indeed, contemporarily, there is a tendency to conceptualise individual's identity as an ongoing productive process.

So we expect collective identities, such as gender and national identities, no matter in how essentialist a form they are dressed by politically interested parties, actually to be lived by individuals as *changeable* and unpredictable. And the way they take shape and change is *relational*. In other words there is no thinkable specification of selfhood that does not have reference to other people, known or imagined. (Cockburn, 1998, p.212)

Although it is clear from the above discussion that there are differences of opinion over the conceptualisation of the process of categorisation, it is not always clear what the consequences of these differing interpretations might be for society. This is a matter of which, Cockburn (1998) reminds us:

Essentialism is not merely an interesting theoretical concept. It is a dangerous political force, designed to shore up differences and inequalities, to sustain dominations. It operates through stereotypes that fix identity in eternal dualisms (Cockburn, 1998, p.13)

It is with this in mind that I conclude this preliminary discussion of essentialist and non-essentialist categorisations by discussing some of the consequences arising from these differing conceptual frameworks.

Exploring the challenges of a non-essentialist stance

The thesis presents a sustained critique of essentialism, and advocates a non-essentialist conceptual process as a necessary means of challenging prejudice and discrimination. This critique is put forward in relation to both

research methods and educational processes, and takes both a theoretical and a practical stance. As I have shown in the above (semantic and conceptual) problematisation, human categories are transient in temporal, individual and geographical terms. I argue that such categorisations must therefore be contingent. The emphasis of the debate is on undermining binary oppositions and on challenging over-simplification. As such, I do not adopt an anti-essentialist position (itself implying a dichotomous relationship with essentialism, i.e. one defined in essentialist terms) but a non-essentialist one. In the section that follows, I reinforce this distinction as I explore some of the challenges levelled against anti-essentialism.

Fuss (1990) explains that challenging essentialism is commonly perceived as problematic in that it is feared that once identity is deconstructed there will remain nothing secure enough upon which to build a politics of resistance. Werbner (1997) supports such a view by arguing that, for example, the promotion of citizens' rights is equally dependent on essentialism as is ethnic cleansing.

Policy decision, state fund allocations, nationalist conflicts or revivals, even genocide, follow on essentialist constructions of unitary, organic cultural collectivities. (ibid., p.229)

This has led Werbner (1997), among others, to consider that while the damaging consequences of essentialism must be recognised and undermined, that essentialism is also a necessary feature of the fight against oppression. In the eyes of some critics the strategic use of essentialism can bridge the divide between the polar opposites of essentialism and anti-

essentialism (Bonnett, 2000). Kilburn (1996) explores Spivak's *strategic essentialism*, a concept that he claims is commonly misunderstood:

Essentialism is bad, not in its essence - which would be a tautology -- but only in its application. The goal of essentialist critique is not the exposure of error, but the interrogation of the essentialist terms. Uncritical deployment is dangerous. Critique is simply reading the instructions for use. Essentialism is like dynamite, or a powerful drug: judiciously applied, it can be effective in dismantling unwanted structures or alleviating suffering; uncritically employed, however, it is destructive and addictive.

Werbner (1997) distinguishes between positive and negative uses of essentialism with the respective terms objectification and reification. From a non-essentialist stance, however, such a distinction is irrelevant as it is the conceptual foundations that are in question, not their intended consequences. It is in this vein that I go on to argue throughout the thesis that the challenge for those opposing essentially produced prejudice is to facilitate more contingent and complex understandings of group categorisations rather than to focus on the manner of their use. This is given particular attention in chapters 3 and 4 in relation to positive and negative stereotypes and education for prejudice reduction, as well as its evaluation.

Importantly, such a stance does not entail abandoning recognition of group difference and the existence of collectivities. I share Werbner's (1997) concern over the tendency of anti-essentialism to be indiscriminate in its accusation of essentialism and, thus, scathing of any collective representations. It is such a response to essentialism that places anti-essentialism where it is unable to serve social action.

In my view, the relationship between essentialism and collective representation warrants further discussion. They are not, I believe, mutually dependent. While the logic of the statement that follows might be hard to question, I cannot agree with the initial supposition from which those logical conclusions are drawn.

If to name is to represent, to imply a continuity and discreteness in time and place, then it follows that all collective namings or labellings are essentialist and that all discursive constructions of social collectivities – whether of community, class, nation, race or gender – are essentialising. (Werbner, 1997, pp.228/9)

I contend, as I expand upon fully in Chapter 4, that to name is not to necessarily imply a continuity and discreteness in time and place. This is to conflate categorisation and essentialism. The non-essentialist proposition that I make is that categorisation is a fundamental necessity to human interaction but that it must not be intransigent or fixed; that it must be founded in a non-essentialist conceptual framework.

The problem, I believe, is that for too long we have let anti-racism or multiculturalism rely upon the conceptual foundations of prejudice. Their capacity to undermine prejudice is thus necessarily limited. Yuval-Davis (1997) is critical of multiculturalism and antiracism on the grounds that 'in both approaches there is the inherent assumption that all members of a specific cultural collectivity are equally committed to that culture.' (p.200). She continues, 'They tend to construct the members of minority collectivities as basically homogeneous, speaking with a unified cultural or racial voice.' (ibid.). Such a construction emphasises difference and, for example, it is

arguable, has led antiracism to reinforce a black/white binary division. I expand upon this debate in Chapter 3 where I explore the relationship between essentialism and prejudice and the tendency for multicultural and antiracist education to be founded in essentialist conceptualisations. Likewise, this issue is raised in Chapter 4 where I challenge the implicit essentialism of the contact hypothesis.

Constructions of group voice, albeit intended as a means of fighting oppression, 'can inadvertently collude with authoritarian fundamentalist leaders who claim to represent the true "essence" of their collectivity's culture and religion' (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p.201). Throughout the thesis it is my contention that essentially founded constructions of group identity cannot but be destructive ultimately. One of the difficulties of such conceptualisations is their unrealistically simplified portrayal of the world. Fuss (1990) states that 'It is common practice in social constructionist argumentation to shift from the singular to the plural in order to privilege heterogeneity' (p.4) in the belief that such a move undermines essentialism. However, she continues, 'While this maneuver does mark a break with unitary conceptual categories [...], the hasty attempts to pluralise do not operate as sufficient defences or safeguards against essentialism.' (p.4). Hence, Fuss (1990) explains that such notions of multiple identity merely displace rather than counter essentialism.

Once again it is not a question of quantity but one of quality; the process of the formation of collectivities (their conceptualisation) is what is of importance.

This is explored further in Chapter 3 where I demonstrate the potential for relativism to become the ally of essentialism.

Identity politics that is founded on theories of exclusions are, argues Fuss (1990), dangerous and misleading. (an issue that I raise again in the next chapter in exploring research relationships) While experience might provide a platform from which some can speak it necessarily implies excluding others from this possibility. The consequence of this is that 'Identities are itemized, appreciated, and ranked on the basis of which identity holds the greatest currency at a particular historical moment and in a particular institutional setting.' (ibid., p.116). A further tendency is for one part of an individual's identity to represent the whole so, writes Fuss (1990), 'A male professor, for example is typically reduced to his "maleness," an Asian professor to his or her "Asianness," a lesbian professor to her "lesbianness," and so on.' (p.116) The conceptualisation of collective identities is thus one which is deterministic and reductive, that is essentialist.

McLaren (1999) is clear that the problem lies at a conceptual level – the very notion of binary oppositions rather than the privileging of a particular. I conclude, in agreement with him, that non-essentialist conceptualisations seem to offer the only plausible means of challenging prejudice and discrimination. Rather than continuing to perpetuate divisions along the lines of race, whether to oppress or overcome oppression, we need to make a break on a conceptual level and free ourselves from the concept of race (Gilroy, 2000). To do so requires a non-essentialist categorisation process. To

achieve this, 'Identity must be continually assumed and immediately called into question.' (Gallop, quoted in Fuss, 1990, p.104). Such a conceptualisation, Fuss (1990) concludes, implies that 'It is not so much that we possess "contingent identities" but that identity itself is contingent.' (p.104). Identity, thus construed, is a dynamic (therefore, inherently non-essentialist) concept. The thesis focuses on the means of building and sustaining such non-essentialist conceptual processes, on individual and group levels. A practical translation of this theoretical stance is given in chapters 5 and 6 in exploration of educational initiatives. However, in order that the ensuing theoretical discussions be rooted in practical reality, I illustrate many of the issues that will be raised through the following brief discussion of ethnic monitoring.

Concepts and consequences

"Ethnic records" are seen by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) as 'an essential tool in achieving racial equality' (CRE, 2000), without which discrimination could not effectively be tackled. It is, therefore, they would argue, imperative that we recognise both those categories related to "ethnicity" and, thus, the concept of ethnicity itself. This is a common stance held by those who claim that it has become necessary to identify "ethnic minorities" in order to fight the cause against discrimination levelled on the same grounds. Others oppose the very idea of categorisation, as they claim it serves to reinforce divisions and perpetuate essentialist conceptions of difference that are both inaccurate and undesirable. Perhaps more commonly,

there are also those who recognise its short-comings but, like Bonnett and Carrington (2000), see ethnic monitoring as a “problematic necessity”. The discussion of ethnic monitoring raises many issues, particularly those related to overcoming prejudice, that feature prominently throughout the thesis. Hence, it provides a useful introduction to the ensuing study.

I am critical of the idea of ethnic monitoring, primarily on the grounds that it appears to reinforce an essentialist notion of difference. By suggesting that there is one aspect of an individual’s identity (in this case ethnicity) that is of greater significance than any other, the notion of homogeneous groups is perpetuated. Further to this, it can be argued that ethnic categories, themselves arbitrarily generated, reinforce particular divisions. This is of particular concern as the categories suggested by the CRE for this purpose, rather than focusing on “ethnicity” (commonly recognised as embodying a reasonably sophisticated range of cultural and linguistic differences), appear most interested in “what shade of black” somebody is. Thus monitoring is reduced to a simplistic division of people based on the yet more questionable concept of “race”.

Evidently, the main issue is not one of whether the divisions are “ethnic” or “racial”, but of the deterministic (essentialist) concept of difference that accompanies such monitoring. The CRE defends itself with the following argument.

Labelling people, and differentiating between them according to their racial or ethnic origin is already a fairly common practice in society, and has developed irrespective of ethnic record-keeping. Racial origin, like

gender, is a matter of fact. It is not, therefore, unlawful to label people. (CRE, 2000).

This, in my view is a very weak justification, and one that allows many dubious practices to be perpetuated unquestioned. For example, following this logic it could be argued that, given racism exists irrespective of the education system, it is justifiable to perpetuate racism through educational practice. I make this point not to question the honourable motives of the CRE, but to demonstrate the importance of critically evaluating processes as well as intentions. The notion that "racial origin" is a "matter of fact" is a disturbing one. Such a perception can serve to legitimate prejudice.

the continued use of the notion of "race" in educational research [or, I would argue, in any other respect], whether intentional or not, upholds a definition of "race" as a causal factor. In other words, significance and meaning are attributed to phenotypical features, rather than the historical, social and discursive production of processes of racialization. Further the use of the term "race" often serves to conceal the fact that the particular sets of social conditions experienced by racialized groups are determined by the interplay of complex social processes, one of which is premised on the articulation of racism to effect legitimate exclusion. (McLaren and Torres, 1999, p.47).

It is hard to move away from this categorisation, continue McLaren and Torres, as even progressive intellectuals are reluctant to abandon the term "race" albeit for apparently positive reasons - the desire to preserve the force of power struggles historically conceptualised in this term.

The insistence upon recognising categories of difference as a means of overcoming divisions is paralleled in the educational context. I raise this issue in Chapter 3 with the argument that it is necessary to abandon the notion of

reinforcing positive images of groups, if we are to overcome group-based prejudice.

It is tempting to believe that fighting for equality within the terms of “ethnic” or “racial” differences is justifiable given that we are far from living in a society in which discrimination upon these lines is absent. However, even if one were to concede that this might be justifiable as an interim measure, there is little evidence to suggest that such initiatives as ethnic monitoring help to challenge prejudice on any level.

While the CRE (2000) is loyal to the common sense notion that the best means of monitoring equal opportunities is by analysis of the workforce by ethnic origin, they too recognise it to be inherently limited. It is recognised that ‘In most cases the analysis of the ethnic data will not, in itself prove the existence or non-existence of racial discrimination.’ (CRE, 2000). In their view, ethnic records should be regarded merely as a tool to help eliminate discrimination. They go on to state the importance of the underlying conditions of the work place in reducing discrimination.

To be effective, ethnic records need to function within a positive equal opportunity environment, with a clear and strong commitment to act upon the information that monitoring produces. (CRE, 2000)

It appears, not unsurprisingly, that it is not the collection of statistical information that determines the equality of opportunity, but the conditions (structures and processes) of the work place. It is through such a justification that the emphasis of this study is on the processes or methods of working rather than quantifiable outcomes.

A further danger of measuring outcomes in this manner, as I explore throughout the thesis in relation to practice in cross-cultural exchange, is the tendency for indicators of outcomes to be reinvented as recipes for success. By this I mean that, for example, while representative numbers of different “ethnic” groups throughout a company may indicate equality of opportunity, to alter a situation to make this the case does not necessarily bring about equality. In fact it could have a very negative impact. Indeed, the CRE (2000) does not recommend implementing systems of quotas; they are clear that to do so would be discriminatory. Given this, and given the apparent importance of processes over outcomes, not to mention the reinforcement of essentially construed difference brought about by ethnic monitoring, it is hard to find justification for perpetuating such a practice, whatever its intentions.

However, this is not to say that the task in hand is merely one of wishing away or ignoring these categories, for they form a fundamental part of our conceptual and social framework (Bonnett, 2000).

[...] while we reject the term "race" as an analytic or semantic category, we wish to emphasize that we understand "race" to be a sociological reality with devastating effects. (McLaren and Torres, 1999, p.49).

Evidently, there is no simple solution at hand. This must not, however, become an excuse for an apathetic *laissez-faire* attitude to the problem of group-based discrimination, nor for continuing practices (that are arguably harmful), such as ethnic monitoring or some forms of multicultural education, purely because no better alternative is readily apparent. We need to strive towards answering questions like that posed by May (1999b):

How can we acknowledge group-based cultural differences - which clearly exist - while at the same time holding on to a non-essentialist conception of culture?(p.27)

As such a means is sought for educationalists to combat discrimination, Gilroy's (2000) advice should be borne in mind.

[our response to racism] must step away from the pious ritual in which we always agree that "race" is invented but are then required to refer to its embeddedness in the world and to accept that the demand for justice requires us nevertheless innocently to enter the political arenas it helps to mark out. (Gilroy, 2000, p.52)

Processes of tackling the realities of racism must be developed in a manner that does not perpetuate discrimination through the perpetuation of and reliance upon essentialist categorisations.

Finding a vocabulary

Here, in the light of the above discussion, I outline the terms that I have chosen to adopt for use in the thesis. As the study will demonstrate, my greatest concern is with the process of categorisation rather than the terms with which categories are expressed, but it is also important to recognise that the choice of words is not neutral.

In the field of education, "antiracist" and "multicultural" are terms with deeply embedded meanings and historical significance, a point which I explore further in Chapter 3. Apart from their historically tied meanings, I avoid these terms, beyond a discussion of past practices, on account of their implicit notion of a humanity composed of distinct groups. It is important to find a new vocabulary of change that frees practitioners from the constraints of questionable practices apparently derived from common sense.

My attention also is not on challenging racism, nationalism or xenophobia as distinct entities in themselves, but on working to overcome inequalities and prejudices however derived. Thus, I prefer to use the term “group-based” in reference to prejudices and attendant forms of discrimination, although this may appear more cumbersome.

Given that categorisation itself is a vital component of communication, as Chapter 4 will demonstrate, I have not been able to avoid employing all related terms. I have, in particular, made use of the word “culture”. This is for quite a specific reason – it allows for a non-essentialist conceptualisation of categorisation, that can be rooted in the ways and practices of everyday life rather than predetermined essences.

[...] cultural identity is socially derived, individually generated and enacted, and historically and politically rooted. (Maguire, 1997, p.52)

However, “culture” is not impervious to essentialism. Sometimes it appears to be used as another euphemism for “race”, whether consciously or not.

In Europe, only Iceland could be said to be a monocultural society. (Council of Europe, 2000g)

It is hard to imagine what could be meant by such a statement. I cannot conceive of any monocultural country, particularly if by “culture” we mean something much more complex than skin colour. However, it is important to be aware, that whatever term one uses and whatever meaning one may attach to it, how a word is used or interpreted by others is beyond one’s control.

Having said that, I will not shy away from defining the notion of culture from which I work. Culture should be defined, in my opinion, in terms of the shared practices of daily life, rather than as a predetermined consequence of assignment to a particular category. Importantly, culture, therefore, may well be influenced by religion, region, and language, but it is not determined by them. Culture, thus defined, is *not* a property that underlies and accounts for the bulk of an individual's other characteristics. Significantly, therefore, according to the definition explored above, it is not essentialist.

Given this understanding of culture, I share the sentiment of Williams' (1996) definition of cultural exchange.

The term "cultural exchange" is used to describe activities in which two or more people communicate through cultural expression or conversation. [...] It may involve the movement of various forms of art into and out of countries, or it may comprise exchanges between communities within one country or among different groups within the same community. (ibid., p.10)

Although cultural exchange (in the instances that this label is attached) is commonly international, it is important to distinguish between the terms. I want to maintain Williams' above idea that culture can imply many divisions imposed by society and allows a greater acceptance of difference within as well as between groups. It is for this reason that I have chosen to talk of "cross-cultural exchange". This is a term that I use to embody interaction between individuals or groups that may be differentiated between in one or (usually) more ways. Frequently, it is the union of individuals who would not normally meet or be given the opportunity to cooperate with each other.

The Council of Europe (2000h) adopts the term “intercultural” on the grounds that “inter” has the following implied meanings: 'interaction; exchange; breaking down barriers; reciprocity; objective solidarity'. It is defined as ‘the progress from ethnocentrism to the acceptance and appreciation of another culture.’ (Council of Europe, 2000c). As such the process of intercultural learning involves exposing cultural differences and the tensions they bring and seeks to develop a means of peaceful resolution. While I recognise their justification and support their aims, I am reluctant to join the Council of Europe in using the term intercultural.

In my view, the term intercultural implies interaction and exchange between two or more groups (or representatives of groups) that are somehow fixed and predetermined. The groups are existent and the interaction is generated between them. It appears to me founded in a view of cultural borders as being national, rather than fluid and overlapping. Cross-cultural exchange implies a more suspended judgement of difference, while not failing to recognise cultural specificity. Though I may appear to be splitting hairs, it is my intention that through the course of this thesis the significance of this distinction will become clear.

Given the scope of differences that are encompassed within cross-cultural exchange, it could be argued that the term “social inclusion”, as a more global concept, might be used fittingly. However, the term inclusion, or more particularly, its partner “exclusion”, is problematic.

Simply to adopt the rhetoric of contemporary politicians by using a blanket term such as “exclusion” may lead to the perpetuation of

serious errors, both at a theoretical level and at a practical level where policies ostensibly aim to address, or more importantly redress, social inequalities. (Ratcliffe, 1999, p.149)

There are various problems surrounding the use of the term exclusion, not least that usage varies enormously from the broad view of exclusion as a consequence of economic relations resulting in a denial of citizenship rights, to a culturally pathological view. (Ratcliffe, 1999). The term also conjures up a dichotomous perception where one is either excluded or is not, failing to recognise the complexity of social inclusion/exclusion. To further problematise this seemingly useful term, in the context of education, exclusion tends to be used in a very literal sense, though evidently being excluded from a school and being excluded from education are clearly not the same. 'In short', concludes Ratcliffe (1999, p.151) 'the exclusion paradigm tends to conceal more than it reveals, and disempower rather than empower.' Social action is not served by such a blanket term.

Thus, I proceed with my study of cross-cultural exchange. As my definition of the term expresses, my intention is to challenge rigid categorisations while retaining a sufficient recognition of the existence of group-based prejudices that inequality might be challenged.

Overview

The aim of this thesis is to challenge; to push at limits. The limits to which I refer are: first, those of the categories in which we place people and the process by which categorisations are made; and, secondly, and equally importantly, the limits of practical action and academic theory in the arena of

cross-cultural exchange. However, the process of pushing is not a purely destructive one. Importantly, I aim both to deconstruct the boundaries and be critical of the past, and to explore realistic and practical alternatives that contribute to the foundations upon which we might build a future. Thus, while elements of the thesis are theoretical, its firm rootedness in practical experience and field study should preserve the arguments from becoming esoteric.

I conclude my introduction with an overview of the thesis, showing how the arguments unfold chapter by chapter.

Chapter 2 considers the approach to the research; by which I mean the epistemological, methodological and ethical considerations upon which the study is based. It begins by presenting the theoretical foundations - the apparent dichotomy between relativism and universalism and the problems this throws up for contemporary researchers. As an alternative to both, I propose a non-essentialist approach, which entails a non-linear study, founded in intelligent and responsive practices, and located in a specific cultural space-time. I explore the need to approach research as a dialogical process, allowing for reflection on practice and theory. In relation to this I consider the importance of connecting research and social action, and the implications this has both for the role of the researcher, and the ethics of research practice. The theoretical and ethical foundations of the research thus established, the chapter concludes with a critical examination of the methods

employed. Clear parallels are drawn between research and educational practice.

Chapter 3 explores the past and potential future of educational initiatives to reduce prejudice and related discrimination. The emphasis is on the formal education sector. The topic is introduced through a consideration of the role of education in national reproduction. The focus then turns to conceptualisation and prejudice - the complexity of racisms. The conceptual foundations of prejudice are explored and the relationship between prejudice and essentialist conceptualisations of identity are considered. The capacity for relativism to conceal an underlying essentialist conceptual process is discussed as well as the tendency for antiracism and multiculturalism to rest upon essentialist foundations. The chapter concludes by addressing the future – the need to overcome essentialism, through challenging the processes of categorisation. Innovation is called for in relating postmodernism to social action.

Chapter 4 demonstrates that cross-cultural exchange has a long history as a means of practical action to overcome prejudice, both in the formal and nonformal sectors. Historically this has been through face-to-face encounter, but electronic communication is becoming increasingly popular as a means of interaction and cooperation around the globe. The focus of the chapter is a critical analysis of past and current practice. This is preceded by a theoretical rationale for the arguments made, in which I explore communication, categorisation, and conceptualisation. It is concluded that the contact hypothesis is inherently flawed, and that, therefore, there is need for an

alternative basis from which to approach cross-cultural exchange. Such an alternative, it is proposed, should be sufficiently flexible to overcome essentialist conceptualisations of difference, and should show due regard to the complexity of the human communication process.

Chapters 5 and 6 are practice-based reports. Rather than being presented as conventional case-studies, they are an expression of the dialogic process between theory and practice upon which the thesis is founded. Also, these chapters provide a detailed illustration of practice, and theory in action. Given the conclusion that step-by-step guidance for good practice cannot be offered, this offers a more tangible accompaniment to Chapter 7's focus on principles and approaches.

Chapter 5 is a study of a school-based, cross-cultural exchange operating through the medium of electronic communication. This frames a discussion of the relationship between categorisation and identification, and the electronic media. The capacity for electronic communication to live up to the claims made of it – to transcend essentialist categorisation and thus to provide a panacea for prejudice – is questioned. Given that the medium per se cannot provide such a remedy, the study focuses upon how electronic cross-cultural projects might be organised to enable participants to adopt more complex, non-essentialist interpretations of others. *Celebrate!*, the project on which the chapter is based, provides the opportunity for individuals from diverse backgrounds to present their personal experiences of special occasions, celebrations or festivals, and to give their opinions about those occasions.

The emphasis on personal rather than collective narrative, it is argued, contributes to a more complex interpretation of difference that undermines essentialism. The project, however, is presented as an illustration of the potential and of the complexities of practice, rather than as a model of good practice.

Chapter 6, relates to another cross-cultural exchange, this time a youth exchange project in the non-formal sector. The project, *Walking through windows*, was a nine-day residential exchange with an emphasis on the arts as a means of collaboration. On the basis of my past collaboration with Beavers Arts, the organisation managing the project, the study focuses on their apparent capacity to generate flexible and open groups when working with people of disparate needs, interests and experiences. The emphasis is thus on working processes. My well-established relationship with Beavers Arts allows the chapter to give detailed insights into their working practices, gained through observation, participation, and interviews. Through detailed illustrations of working practices, significant elements of the working process are identified. These are subsequently discussed, and more general comments made regarding both techniques, and the ethos and style from which practice is approached.

Chapter 7 draws together the discussions of the preceding chapters with a view to addressing educational practice and evaluation. Given the conclusion that practice, both in pedagogy and evaluation, should be dynamic and responsive, no attempt is made to offer a step-by-step recipe for success. As

an alternative, the chapter puts forward principles by which a responsive approach to practice might be guided, and proposes that evaluation be exposed to the same methodological and ethical concerns as research. I conclude with reference to the broader social and political context, and reinforce the need to embrace a non-essentialist approach at both personal and structural levels.

Chapter 2: The research process – theories and practice

As a new researcher, in effort to produce a credible data set, one grapples for direction among diverse epistemologies, philosophies, and ethics. The role of this chapter is, through the consideration of all of these, to establish a well-justified methodological framework within which to present the research techniques employed.

The research is founded on the premise that the topic and form of one's study is necessarily contained in one's world view. Just as it would be unfeasible for a "flat-Earther" to study the intricacies of the Earth's orbit, any researcher is limited by the plethora of constraints and biases that their own understandings bring to their study. For this reason, I lay the epistemological foundations of the study prior to considering the particular research techniques employed. I make brief explorations of two thought "revolutions" around which I develop my argument. Clearly both are embedded in significant social and cultural change, though I turn to just two key figures for the purposes of illustration. First I refer to the Cartesian origins of rational enquiry, before leaping to what could be interpreted as the catalyst to its demise – the rise of Einsteinian (relativist) science.

While relativism has undermined faith in Cartesian certainty and its universalist foundations, there is limited confidence that it provides a workable alternative for social research. Contemporary researchers thus face a dilemma expressed aptly by the critical theorist, Lather:

Poised at the end of the twentieth century, the human sciences are in search of a discourse to help chart the journey from the present to the future. Withering critiques of relativism take us into the millennium. (1994, p.36)

In response to this my attention focuses upon how researchers might employ a non-essentialist epistemological framework within which to negotiate the traditionally assumed dichotomy between universalism and relativism.

Having thus laid the theoretical foundations, my attention then turns to establishing an ethical framework from which to practice. The choice of the word “framework” is a considered one, as it is a principled basis for intelligent reflection that is given, rather than a fool-proof set of guidelines. Ethical issues, I argue, require complex consideration and can only be satisfactorily resolved in relation to the particular. The same, I propose, is true of research procedures in general.

It is not novel to suggest that the research process is a complex one for which no predetermined procedure can make adequate provision. However, maintaining this view while conducting research that can withstand the pressure to produce valid and reliable data, is not a matter that is easily resolved. I argue that high quality research (in common with high quality educational practice, as I reinforce in Chapter 7) must be a responsive process. The reproduction of preconceived, step-by-step procedures cannot substitute for intelligent practice that continually responds to the immediate context. Each research project will be uniquely the product of the individuals involved, each researcher will have their own style of working. Rather than

becoming an obstacle to the quest for truth, this, I argue, should be the foundation of valid and ethical research.

Within this context I reflect upon the role of the researcher; and importantly (given my questioning of more traditional ideas), I challenge the notion that a critical approach hinders social change. In doing so, I explore the consequences for research of essentialist and non-essentialist conceptualisations of human categorisations, and make explicit the links between research and social action. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the fieldwork undertaken. The discussion is both of the data collection techniques employed, and related practical and ethical considerations.

The rational foundations of scientific enquiry

The modern world's faith in absolute truth and clear dichotomies provides a backdrop against which rationality and empiricism enable "progress", and the possibility of knowing, and thus controlling, the world. Indeed, Cohen and Manion (1994) in their widely used guide to educational research, propose that research plays an essential role in "enlightened" progress. As such, they describe it as 'a combination of both experience and reasoning and must be regarded as the most successful approach to the discovery of truth' (ibid. p.5). Knowledge is a vehicle for progress and power in the modernist view; and research is the means to knowledge. Cohen and Manion (1994) express this clearly in choosing to cite the following quote (taken from Mouly, 1978) to summarise what research is. It is described as:

a most important tool for advancing knowledge, for promoting progress, and for enabling man to relate more effectively to his environment, to accomplish his purposes, and to resolve his conflicts' (p.40)

This conceptualisation of research appears to have its origins in the scientific developments of the seventeenth century and the Enlightenment. As such, it is a product of the fundamental shift in understanding brought about by the growing acceptance of the Cartesian concepts of freedom, mastery and progress (Schouls, 1989). These concepts in turn are dependent on an understanding of subjectivity founded in Cartesian doubt.

In his quest to search purely for a universal truth Descartes began from a supposition that he should reject as false any notion that could possibly be doubted. This led to a recognition that his own existence was a necessary precursor to his capacity to recognise all else as false. However, the existence of his *body* was subject to the same doubt.

I was a substance whose whole essence or nature consists only in thinking, and which, that it may exist, has need of no place, nor is dependent on any material thing; so that "I", that is to say the mind by which I am what I am, is wholly distinct from the body. (1975, p.27)

This is the means by which "I" could be distinguished from the material world, a concept without which objective or disinterested enquiry is not possible. We should remember that

for Descartes, no action can be called truly human unless it can be called rational; that it cannot be called rational unless it is dictated by knowledge; and that there is no knowledge apart from science. (Schouls, 1989, pp.18/19)

Rational enquiry is, thus, the only means to truth. Central to the Cartesian method is the notion that reason and perception are distinct. A discovery of

reason is one deriving from the perception of the universal in the individual instance (Lindsay, 1975).⁵ This, Schouls (1989) states, is a question of understanding things in terms of themselves rather than in terms of something else. It entails a rejection of all that we have absorbed through cultural context and thus makes very clear the distinction between what Schouls terms Descartes' "radical form of epistemic individualism" and relativism.

Once we accept the connection between the Cartesian possibility of subjectivity and the possibility of scientific research, or gaining knowledge, then it can only be concluded that a fundamental challenge to the Cartesian notion of subjectivity is also a challenge to the nature of research and of truth. Such is my crude justification for now leaping from the seventeenth to the twentieth century at which time it is generally recognised that critiques of the modern were freed from their confinement to the baroque and became more widely accepted. It is at this point, I shall argue, that the Cartesian subject/object distinction began to have its hegemonic status undermined. This claim is not intended to deny the (often fundamental) differences in the conceptions of truth held by diverse thinkers over a period of more than two centuries, but rather to argue for recognition of their common reliance on the foundations of universalism. I will now go on briefly to consider the nature of the challenge to rational empiricism⁶.

⁵ A notion that can be linked to an essentialist conceptualisation as introduced in Chapter 1.

⁶ For those interested in further understanding the revolutions in thought from Descartes to the present day, Appleby et al. (1996) give an excellent oversight through the readings of a wide range of philosophers in *Knowledge and postmodernism in historical perspective*.

A relativist challenge to rationality

It is not my task here to dwell on the complexities of the relativist challenge to modern rationality and its social consequences. Instead I offer an introduction to the fundamental ideas that have dethroned the Cartesian conceptualisation upon which it was founded. In particular, there are two key inter-linked aspects of Einstein's theory of relativity and Saussure's linguistic works to which I would like to draw attention: relativity, and the challenge to the position of the independent observer. Einstein's proof of the limitations of the Euclidean geometry of space and time dismantled the (rational scientific) Newtonian absolute - a static given against which all things could previously be measured. Equally,

The most revolutionary element in Saussure's position was his insistence that language is not a nomenclature, a way of naming things which already exist, but a system of differences with no positive terms.(Belsey 1992, p.38)⁷

In contrast with a modern (Cartesian) worldview, there is no distinct and external reality in which things can be rationally interpreted in terms of a universal structure. There is no subject who can stand back and posit a material world. There is no transcendental order⁸.

This disturbance to our conceptualisation process is translated into what is commonly called (in attempt to somehow contain such elusive ideas)

⁷ This corresponds neatly with a non-essentialist conceptualisation as outlined in Chapter 1.

⁸ The parallels with essentialist and non-essentialist conceptualisations of identity, as explored in Chapter 1, are worthy of note.

"postmodernism" or "poststructuralism". Usher and Edwards (1994) outline some of the changes this has brought about in terms of research:

There is an increasing recognition that all knowledge claims are partial, local and specific rather than universal and ahistorical, and that they are always imbued with power and normative interests - indeed that what characterises modernity is precisely the concealing of the partiality and rootedness of knowledge-claims in the cloak of universality and value-neutrality. Thus in postmodernity there is a rejection of universal and transcendental foundations of knowledge and thought, and a heightened awareness of the significance of language, discourse and socio-cultural locatedness in the making of any knowledge-claim. (p.10)

Contemporarily, these proposals do not appear too controversial or disruptive to social action. However, in its more radical interpretations, relativism stands accused of fuelling a destructive process. Certainly theorists such as Baudrillard paint a bleak and debilitating picture for the future. Such is the scale of challenge presented by relativism that, write Barnes and Bloor (1982), it is subject to attack from across the political spectrum; seen both as a threat to the status quo and an opening for neo-conservatism. However, it is not my interest here to explore the details of these critiques. Instead I turn to address the more productive question of how resistance to the oppression of modern rationality may be transformed into constructive action. Given the focus of this chapter, I explore this through the research process.

A non-essentialist alternative

The challenge to the researcher rejecting a Cartesian framework seems to be, on the one hand, to verify and validate findings in order to fulfil legitimately the perceived knowledge-producing function of research; on the other, to

reconcile this with a world view that rejects the notions of universality. To my surprise I am coming to recognise that the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. I argue that it is time to move beyond the limits imposed by a rationalist approach to research in the social sciences. In order to find an acceptable alternative, I propose that it is necessary to exceed the boundaries of Cartesian dualism while, at the same time, not straying into the nihilistic chasms of self-referentiality produced by “postmodernist” notions of relativism. In other words, I am arguing for a non-essentialist interpretation of the differences between universalism and relativism, as I argue throughout the thesis for non-essentialist interpretations of difference between people. In relation to the current discussion of theoretical frameworks, this becomes possible if the focus is not on the inherent truth or otherwise of any belief, but on the weight it carries in the world of human existence and the extent of its influence. The approach advocated (again in parallel with that proposed for human categorisation) is, thus, one that is grounded in practical reality, as opposed to transcendental theory.

Lather (1994) similarly explores the need to embed theory in context (theoretical and practical) as a means of overcoming some of the constraints of a modernist framework. Escaping the nihilism often associated with the postmodern, she reconceptualises the “crisis of representation” not as the end of representation but as the end of pure presence. In this sense the focus of research is redirected, away from the thing itself to the web of its location.

It is not a matter of looking harder or more closely, but of seeing what frames our seeing - spaces of constructed visibility and incitements to see which constitute power/knowledge. (ibid., p.38)

In my view, this is a demonstration of an understanding that the objects of our "knowledge" are embedded in the peculiarities of a specific cultural space-time; or, in other words, that understanding is context bound. It appears that this is the basis on which Gitlin and Russell (1994) define the intent of their research approach, which is 'not to discover absolutes, or the "truth", but to scrutinize normative "truths" that are embedded in a specific historical and cultural context.' (p. 185). Miller (1997) connects this with the capacity of qualitative research to enable a study of social relationships to incorporate an analysis of the processes through which social realities are constructed. This is an analysis of what constructs our knowing, or an exploration of the boundaries of our conceptual frameworks. Just as these frameworks are perceived as finite (transient rather than transcendental), then it appears logical that particular methods will also have their boundaries and, thus, not be appropriate for all research. By the same means as (in an Einsteinian world) Newtonian science continues to offer a workable and practical means of operating where objects of a human scale are concerned, it is the case that there may be a valuable place for research grounded in the principles of modern rationality. However, I argue that it is equally important to recognise the limitations of such an approach. While Newtonian science offers inadequate explanations of the atomic and the astronomic, every approach to research is contained within a knowledge system whose boundaries of usefulness need to be recognised.

From this perspective, things are not in the crisis we perceive them to be through a vision constructed in absolutist, or essentialist, terms. The main challenge that remains is to demonstrate why the particular techniques are appropriate for the study in question - something that we take for granted as necessary. Prior to addressing research techniques, I continue to prepare the framework of the research with a discussion of ethics.

Ethics

Researchers should conduct their research ethically, and be seen to be doing so, both in the interests of paying due consideration to those involved, and of preserving the possibility of conducting good quality research (Foster, 1999). Ethical guidelines, Foster continues, can be of use if they do the following: alert researchers to fundamental moral principles; demonstrate how these principles might be translated into practice; and indicate the kinds of ethical issues that may arise in the research process. What ethical guidelines should not do is to provide a rigid set of procedures that does not take account of the complexities of research ethics in practice.

Because each research project is different and has its own unique mix of circumstances and issues, and because the decisions researchers must make are often highly complex, what I do not think is needed is a rigid prescriptive list of do's and don'ts - a set of narrow regulations about appropriate conduct for researchers. (Foster, 1999)

There is no natural law of ethics and we should not attempt to impose one, if for no other reason than 'that there is simply no consensus on the key ethical questions raised by our research. There is no hard-and-fast way to calculate the costs and benefits of social science research.' (Punch, 1986, p.81).

Equally, in spite of this, social scientists should be keenly aware of the moral dimension in their work, rather than hiding behind the elitist veil of universality or the nihilism of relativity.

Ethics, then, can best be considered in relation to more concrete matters, and should be enmeshed within every aspect of the research process. It is for this reason that this section remains only the briefest of introductions into research ethics. Throughout the remainder of the chapter ethical issues form an important aspect of the discussion. This is so, both in regard to the relationships between the researcher, the research and the researched, and in connection to the research processes that form this study. The responsive approach to research, outlined below, lends itself well to sensitive, ethical practice.

Before turning to these issues, I take this opportunity to restate the four motivations for research outlined in Chapter 1, as these are indicative of the underlying values and commitments that the research embodies.

- the project must be personally challenging
- the participants must be respected
- the project must have some positive outcome
- the reporting of the research must be true to the experience

In essence, my concerns are that the research is valid, socially useful, and conducted in a sensitive and respectful manner.

Towards a flexible and responsive practice

Different qualitative methods provide researchers with different possibilities for "knowing" the social settings they describe and analyse. (Miller, 1997, p.1)

Clearly, research techniques are something more, or something other, than a neutral tool for gathering data or extracting knowledge from "the world out there". The research does not merely uncover knowledge, but produces it, and does so within a particular frame that is dependent on the techniques adopted. It would be reassuring, given this, to be certain of what might be the "right" techniques to employ; to know how "the best" results might be guaranteed. However, it is also clear that such formulae do not exist. As ever, the process is more complex.

There is no codified body of procedures that will tell someone how to produce a perceptive, insightful, or illuminating study of the educational world. (Eisener, 1998, p.169)

Indeed, Walford (1991) goes so far as to suggest that the notion of objective research following a straight forward step-by-step process is widely recognised as a fraud. Fraudulent or not, the linear approach advocated in some research "cook books" is increasingly viewed as less than adequate. Qualitative research in the educational and social sciences, it appears, is not necessarily best developed in a traditional linear approach of identifying questions, taking a methodology "off the peg", implementing the research accordingly, and concluding with data analysis. Rather, I am inclined to agree with Eisener (1998):

qualitative enquiry works best if researchers remain aware of the emerging configuration and make appropriate adjustments accordingly.

A preformulated plan of procedure indifferent to emerging conditions is the surest path to disaster. (p. 170)

He continues that flexibility and adjustment are central to successful qualitative research; to the extent that sometimes even the research aims will change during the course of enquiry. This is the basis on which I advocate a non-linear approach to research; an approach which strives to recognise the complexity of the interaction between personal beliefs and ethics, educational and research practice, and conceptual understanding. Most importantly, such an approach generates a space for learning and for adapting the research accordingly – being responsive.

Although (or perhaps *because*) it necessitates a considerable degree more thought, the absence of a research recipe can only be viewed as a positive thing. The advantage is that each research project must develop according to its particular context. As Gitlin and Russell (1994) argue:

Procedures should be allowed not only to evolve within a specific research study but also to change given the needs and priorities of a particular population. (p.188)

Understanding and practice are conjoined in a process that redirects enquiry rather than produces an end research product. 'This allows the research process to alter the questions asked and influence practice on insights gained.' (Gitlin and Russell, 1994, p.186).

Flexibility in the implementation of research is invaluable, not least because during the course of the research unanticipated matters inevitably arise and must be dealt with appropriately.

the actual conduct of the researcher, and the outcomes of research, are vulnerable to unique developments in the field and to dramatic predicaments that can often be solved only *situationally*. (Punch, 1986, p.26)

“Critical moments”, as Woods (1998) terms them, arise unexpectedly and can lead to exceptional insights or redirect the research. Researchers must then be open to such learning opportunities and ready to take action and change their plans. Indeed, qualitative research demands such a responsive and intelligent approach.

Qualitative enquiry requires a considerable faith that researchers will be sensitive to the significant and able to make the right moves in context. (Eisener, 1998, p.170)

This is not only so in relation to moments of startling insight, but should be part of an ongoing process. Meaning, write Hanrahan et al (1999) of their research, is continually rewritten and reconceptualised in the light of new learning experiences. This, they state, requires a continual process of reflection and responsive action. As such, qualitative research can be viewed as a dialectical process in which data are produced through interconnecting techniques, methods and context (Miller 1997).

The expression of the need to be responsive is not the same as advocating an unplanned approach. Rather, it is the proposal that, while planning and preparation are essential, alterations should be allowed in the light of events. If too rigid an interpretation is avoided, Bassey's (1995) presentation of *cyclical* research provides a useful alternative to linear research models. The process he outlines has the following stages: identification of research aim; planning of investigation; collection of data, analysis of data; reflection. Each

stage is sequentially revisited until at some point a finalised report is produced. Such a responsive process is supported by the following action research methodology defined by Somekh (1995).

Action research methodology bridges the divide between research and practice. It directly addresses the knotty problem of the persistent failure of research in the social sciences to make a difference in terms of bringing about actual improvements in practice. It does so by rejecting the concept of a two-stage process in which research is carried out first by researchers and then in a second separate stage the knowledge generated from the research is applied to practitioners. Instead the two processes of research and action are integrated. (p. 340)

Adopting a responsive and flexible approach is of particular value in terms of maintaining ethical practice. While flexibility cannot guarantee sensitivity, it is supportive of it, and enables the research to attend to the needs and interests of those people it involves or otherwise affects.

The researcher, the research, and the researched

The PhD has become a journey for me, a search for the research methodology which is capable of allowing me to participate fruitfully in the construction of new knowledge in the field of education in a way which is just and equitable to other participants. (Hanrahan et al, 1999, p.403)

This approach to PhD study is common with mine. I have a particularly vivid memory of an experience that arose shortly after I had made my original research proposal. I recount it now as it triggered some fundamental questions regarding researching other people.

It is September 1997, the summer before my research begins, and I am part of a group of “internationals”. Walking though the streets of Mostar, on our way home from an evening of good food and good company, our route takes

us past a friend's shop. We are drawn towards the television screen on display in the window, then silenced by the unfolding images of war-time Mostar. There we are, transfixed,

Standing outside the shop looking in on the world through a glass screen watching television images of the city we are standing in. To us they are the most shocking visions.

In the midst of this the night security man lays out his bed in the shop ready to sleep. A new and chilling dimension to the whole experience.

We stand, hungrily gleaning information, pathetically shocked by what we see. Believing we are gaining an "understanding" of the place we are in. All the time we are here we build up this idea and share stories and information that let us know "what it was really like". Who do we think we are? I have painfully reinforced to me the fact that we know absolutely nothing. Nothing, not just in terms of facts but nothing in terms of the reality of the information. Nor will we ever know. The eagerness I have to talk with people is exposed as a glib voyeurism. It is more than a glass window or a camera that screens me from any level of understanding.

(Personal notes, September 1997)

More than being an emotional account, the above notes raise issues that, at some level, need to be considered in any social research. Issues, which only retrospectively was I able to connect with the work of critical theorists (see Lather, 1986 for example). The following questions were active in my mind as, a matter of weeks later, I was planning my research. What motivates the research? Whose interests does it serve? How can a researcher relate to other people and their experiences? Does a researcher have any right to explore other people's stories? Is it possible to understand others' realities?

Again, I do not think that there are simple answers to any of these questions. However, this does not absolve researchers from the responsibility to seek a means of overcoming these problems. This is particularly so given researchers' relative position of power.

[...] we, as researchers, have the last word. Even as we allow others to speak, we have chosen to whom we wish to listen, the questions which we want them to answer, how much time we will allow them to speak. We as researchers orchestrate the research. We have control. (Arber, 2000, p.45)

It must be acknowledged that the reality that research reports is, at the very minimum, a product of the researcher to the extent that it presents the truth accepted by them. 'This', state Altheide and Johnson (1997), 'involves ontological and epistemological assumptions about reality, objectivity, methodology and professionalism' (p.173).

It is the opinion of some that researchers should strive towards objectivity through attempting to minimise the influence of their opinions and beliefs on the research.

researchers should be aware that their emotional or political commitments can cloud their research judgements - and that this is nothing to be ashamed of, merely that measures should be used to try to minimise this effect. (Tooley with Darby, 1998 p.14)

Such a suggestion is a contentious one, and one that raises many further issues that are the topic of the following discussion. It is to be debated not only the way in which researchers influence their research and what aspects of their identity might be significant in determining this, but also whether neutrality in research is either desirable or possible.

I explore research relationships in the context of the issues raised in Chapter 1 relating to essentialist and non-essentialist conceptualisations of categories. I begin by raising research issues surrounding the reliance on assumptions founded upon essentialist understandings of difference. I make the case for recognition of human differences as being defined in a more complex manner than the familiar binary distinctions allow. As I expand upon in Chapter 4 in relation to communication, this, however, is not to ignore the existence of group-based difference and the importance of generalisations. The question is one of how difference is defined, and I advocate a flexible and non-essentialist definition.

Categories and assumptions

Increasingly, as I have stated above, it is acknowledged that the effect the researcher brings to bear on the research outcomes is significant, and that no two people will uncover exactly the same “truths” about the world. It is common practice in qualitative research for researchers to indicate power differentials through positioning themselves in relation to the research. Hence, “ethnicity”, “gender”, and “social class”, in particular, are revealed. I do not wish to suggest that to recognise such factors is without significance, but I believe that there are also dangers associated with some interpretations of this. I feel that self-positioning of the researcher is particularly problematic when it is founded upon rigid categorisations that assume a world comprising distinct homogeneous groups (founded in essentialism) about which assumptions can be made.

Denscombe (1995) discusses Bennett's controversial approach to research which appears to be founded on the notion of homogeneous groups. It seems that neutrality is sought through the recognition of rigid interpretations of group-based difference. Of particular interest to the point discussed here is Bennett's use of a "balance" in group interviews.

[...] the interviews included the *use of a balance*. Aware that an individual's personal identity and background carry the potential to blind him/her to certain events and heighten sensitivity to others, the "balance" was incorporated to offset any cultural bias resulting from the gender and race of the principal researcher. (Denscombe, 1995, p.134)

The balance is a person who takes part in the interview and post-interview discussion, whose characteristics he deemed to "balance" his own in terms of gender, age and ethnicity. To me, this appears to be founded in an assumption that cultural context or locatedness can in some way be quantified and offset. Rather than exploring the limitations or constraints brought to bear by himself, he seems to attempt neutrality. Quite clearly, however, male and female does not mean neither male nor female (neutral) but means both male *and* female. Equally, there seems little attempt to justify the choice of categorical "opposites" that should be "balanced".

The concern is that Bennett is not alone in his interpretation of group categorisations. Others, while maybe not using the same "solution", seem to share Bennett's views on this matter. Cohen and Manion's (1994) main criticism launched against interviews is bias. One suggested means of reducing this is 'by matching interviewer characteristics with those of the sample being interviewed.' (ibid., p.282). I explore below possible alternative

approaches that, while recognising difference, do not depend upon such rigid categorisations. Prior to doing so, I indicate further ways in which categorisations can be problematic to research.

As I argued in Chapter 1 in relation to ethnic monitoring, and as I go on to discuss in relation to education in Chapter 3, the recognition of group-based differences in essentialist terms serves to perpetuate simplified understandings of difference and enhance prejudice. Concern has been expressed over the potential for research to have a similar effect. For example, Jackson and Penrose (1993) argue that,

Today, it is social scientific interest in the study of "race relations" which runs the risk of legitimating and perpetuating the very categories it set out to undermine. (p.5)

If "race" and racial categories are treated as unproblematic and as though they are transcendental, these categories are naturalised and reinforced (Reicher, 1986). In Chapter 4 I explore this further in relation to the use of attitudinal tests as a method of evaluation.

However, it is not only in terms of "race" that such categorisations are problematic. Connolly (1997) alerts us to the difficulty in relation to researching children. Due to assumptions about those being researched, research develops a tendency to "discover" what is already "known".

an elaborate self-fulfilling prophecy exists where assumptions held about children [or anybody else] are more often than not simply reconfirmed through the way that particular methods are employed and/or the way that data are collected and interpreted. (Connolly, 1997, p.179)

This is both a problem of research technique (for example those based on the assumption that children have limited cognitive ability) and of research values. Clearly, then, as researchers (and as educators and humans) we must be flexible in our categorisations, and our related assumptions must be circumspect.

A non-essentialist approach

If a more flexible notion of human categories is adopted, the diversities of experiences within any given group can be recognised. Being assigned to a category, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, is not thus to have your destiny mapped. Equally, it follows that not all people of the same “kind” share the same experiences. In this vein, Gilroy (2000) presents a convincing argument why those challenging racism need not necessarily be black.

The idea that possessing a particular identity should be a precondition or qualification for engaging in this kind of work is trivial. The intellectual challenge defined here is that histories of suffering should not be allocated exclusively to their victims. If they were, the memory of the trauma would disappear as the living memory of it died away. (ibid., p.114)

However challenging this idea may be, unless one is to conclude that one can only research oneself, it is quite logical. The question to address is how other people and their stories should be represented. It is clear that it is not possible to speak *for* another person - each of us having our own unique perspectives and experiences - but that is not to argue against presenting experiences that are not our own. It is important for researchers not to appropriate the experiences of others, as well as to be conscious of the dynamics of the relationship between themselves and the people and topic of their study.

McLaren (1999) argues that researchers should still position themselves through categories, though he reconstructs the framework of categorisation in non-essentialist terms.

The standpoint epistemologies which I support are those which construe difference not within essentialist or separatist enclaves but which are dialectical and dialogical and which are understood in the context of relations of power and relations of domination and exploitation. (ibid., p.187)

I would add that it is vital, if one is to operate with flexible notions of difference, to recognise ourselves as complex individuals rather than as a limited collection of attributes. To see oneself and others as something more than one half of several selected binaries is vital.

The influence that a researcher has on the research is not dictated purely by what “colour”, “gender”, “age”, or “social class” he or she belongs to. In addition, the attitude to research, the techniques employed, the presentation of data, are not always acknowledged for their powerful influence.

[...] the author is part of the research not only because the questions posed reflect a focus on one set of concerns rather than another, but also because the constructs developed (i.e. the organisation of the data) and even the form and style of the communication are all linked to the perspective and orientation that the author brings to the research project. For research to be authentic, the relationship between what is said and the person(s) doing the talking must be made apparent. (Gitlin and Russell, 1994, p.187)

This is a view expanded upon by McLaren (1999) in his argument for the importance of cultural context in determining meaning.

I do not deny that meanings may be intended and communicated by an author. My central contention is that meanings cannot be essentialised outside the experiences that readers bring to those meanings, the cultural contexts in which those meanings are generated, and the

historical, cultural and economic junctures in which text and reader meet. (ibid., p.193)

Not only is it important in reporting research to recognise the cultural context and the nature of the audience addressed, but it is necessary throughout the research process to be sensitive to the immediate cultures and contexts of the study, whether articulated or not. Responsive practice thus demands greater sensitivity, and enables ethical research conduct.

The ethnographer needs the ability to understand the signs, signals and nuances of a culture which may be implicit to the everyday world of a particular culture yet which are not articulated explicitly to the researcher. (Lovatt and Purkis, 1996, p.262)

For this reason, they continue, an emotional involvement of some degree is necessary.

Empathy cannot be manufactured in the text nor can it be secured by the distanced dispassionate observer, it comes from involvement with an immersion in the field. (ibid., p.263)

Within such a framework, it is necessary to redefine understandings of concepts such as neutrality, validity and reliability, and to move away from interpretations grounded in scientific rationality. This is a matter that I discuss further below in relation to the approach I have taken to the current study. This also calls for a more open model of research in which the presence and intentions of the researcher are clearly acknowledged. This, as I now show, can allow for the research process itself to have direct consequences for social action.

Research and social action

By action research we meant that I would not only participate in and observe the day-to-day life of the projects but also try to contribute in some proactive way to their goals. Of course, to someone concerned for “scientific objectivity”, this intervention would be muddying the water through which I was trying to look. But although rigour and honesty are indispensable, I believe that in all kinds of research it is more productive to acknowledge the active presence of the researcher than to wish it away. A second reason for an action component in this research was that I felt, given their circumstances, that I could hardly ask their projects to afford me their time were I not to devote some of mine to them. (Cockburn, 1998, p.4)

This is very much the angle from which I came to my research, as the discussion in Chapter 1 will have indicated.

The dismantling of scientific ideals and universalism has commonly been associated with nihilism. Usher and Edwards (1994) counter this with the argument that it is the manner in which change can be brought about that has changed, not the capacity for change. Thus social action must be firmly rooted in the particular.

We can still act ethically and still fight for some things rather than others but we have to do this within the *practices* of everyday life and struggle rather than in terms of an appeal to a transcendent and invariant set of values. (ibid., p. 27)

Rather than seeing a critical approach to research as undermining the potential for practical action, I prefer to take the very process of research as a piece of action. Alternative approaches to research, such as McLaren's (1999) critical research, advocate the application of new social theory to reconceptualise educational theory in a way that relates directly to social or educational change.

It is only after decades of challenging myself through abstractions that I have come to realize the concreteness necessary for the challenge ahead. This is not an attack on theory, but a call for theory to be conjugated with the kind of radical hope that is continually born through political struggle and revolutionary praxis. (ibid., p.198)

In this sense, 'ethnography is both a way to study justice as well as a way to "do justice".' (Altheide and Johnson, 1997, p.174).

Far from sinking into moral indifference, contemporary society has cultivated a new politics of research one which recognises that too often academic research has been the site for the exercising of a middle class curiosity upon "the Other" - whether "natives", the working class, deviant groups, or something else - for the purposes of improving knowledge and social policy, the benefits of which to the subjects are highly debatable. (Lovatt and Purkis, 1996, p.261)

An alternative methodology of "Educative Research" is put forward (see also Lather, 1986). This 'encourages a dialogical process where participants negotiate meanings at the level of question posing, data collection, and analysis.' (Gitlin and Russell, 1994, p.185). In this way research can be viewed as a dialogical process; a partnership with, rather than data extraction from, others. A fluidity of relations between academic researchers and teaching practitioners develops and the process becomes a method for both to gain understanding. It is not then a "trickle down" process (Gitlin and Russell, 1994). Rather than asking research "subjects" to consent to being studied, research can become an ongoing process of collaboration and mutual gain. I go on to demonstrate that it is in this manner that I have approached the current work, though, prior to doing so, I demonstrate how the approach to research that I have presented above correlates with action research methodology.

Exploring the relationship with action research methodology

Above, I have outlined a research strategy that is congruent with my motivations and values, i.e. one that generates valid and socially useful knowledge and that demonstrates sensitivity and respect for others. Additionally, I have argued that such a process is dependent on a non-essentialist framework in which knowledge is context specific and contingent. As I have already alluded, the responsive approach to research that I advocate corresponds with the style of research that comes under the broad umbrella of action research.

Action research is 'a methodology which is broadly defined and takes many different forms' (Somekh, 1995, p.340; see also Leitch and Day, 2000). I am in agreement with Somekh (1995) when she continues that this is a desirable reflection of a process grounded both in the values of those conducting it and the specific context. Action research by definition does not adhere to a single, clearly-defined methodology. Thus, writes Somekh (1995), despite her fifteen years' experience of action research, her ideas "are provisional and continue to develop in response to challenge and dialogue" (p.340). Research, both in relation to the specific project and in relation to a general approach, is thus the dynamic and responsive process expounded above.

As such, action research provides a vehicle supportive of my ethical and epistemological inclinations. 'Rather than the illusory "value-free" knowledge of the positivists, praxis-oriented inquirers seek emancipatory knowledge.' (Lather, 1986, p.259). Such knowledge fuels a critical awareness directed at

developing social transformation within a particular context, she continues. Action research, writes Somekh (1995), bridges the divide between research and practice through integrating the two processes in order to generate real improvements in practice. It is, she goes on to say, conducted in the workplace by people directly concerned with the situation being researched. The action research context is, thus, not controlled or designed as an experiment. Instead it is an interactive collaborative process firmly grounded in the cultures and values of those to whom it relates.

Action research knowledge is generated by the individual through detailed examination of, and reflection up, particular experiences and events; and it is different from “propositional knowledge” which claims generalisability across situations. (Somekh, 1995, p.352).

Action research knowledge is, therefore, founded in normative rather than inherent truths; it is non-essentialist. However, in accordance with the approach I have put forward, this does not entail an abandonment of theory. Rather, ‘The search is for theory which grows out of context-embedded data, not in a way that automatically rejects apriori theory, but in a way that keeps preconceptions from distorting the logic of evidence.’ (Lather, 1986, p.267) Gitlin and Russell (1994) argue, as I do, for the need to work both in practice and with theory and to bridge the divide between the two. They introduce a type of action research that is a democratic process through which meaning is dialogically generated. – enables the scrutiny of normative truths instead of the absolute. Given the personal and dialogical nature of the research, they also emphasise the importance of researcher reflexivity, as I have also done.

Action research is a process of critical reflection and is intended to deepen and enhance the complexity practitioners' understandings, and does so in relation to unique contexts (Somekh, 1995). It is, thus, necessarily an uncertain process that is not mappable by a clear linear structure. The process of action research, she continues (in accordance with the approach I have adopted), follows a cyclical structure, with each aspect forming a broad stage in an integrated process rather than a distinct step.

The cyclical action-based approach to research that I follow is a dialogical process that blurs the boundaries of theory and practice and challenges oversimplified construction of research relationships. In the research projects described below, I show my allegiance to qualitative research as defined below.

Two major objectives of qualitative research are to describe and analyse both the processes through which social realities are constructed, and the social relationships through which people are connected to one another. (Miller, 1997, p.3)

My goal is to focus on grounded, practice-based truths as placed in their broader theoretical and societal context as a means of advancing both. Action research provides the methodological framework through which this might be realised.

The current study

The remaining task for this chapter is to introduce how my research was conducted, the techniques employed and the processes by which they were

used. Before doing so, I will briefly reiterate the key issues raised in the above discussion that have moulded the study.

Significantly, the research process, in parallel to the educational process that I go on to advocate, is one of striving towards a non-essentialist interpretation of differences. This is so whether those differences be between epistemological stances, or human categorisations that have commonly been polarised. Similarly reflected in Chapter 7's discussion of educational practice, is the call for a responsive process of research, that is something more than rigid reliance on a predetermined step-by-step guide.

By a responsive process I mean one that is conducted by an intelligent and sensitive practitioner in relation to the context in which it occurs. This entails the development of a clear ethical framework that guides a continual process of adjustment of techniques, understandings, and even aims, in response both to critical incidents, and to more subtle and on-going developments.

Through the recognition that research is not a neutral process, and that neither a researcher nor a set of research techniques can be neutral in producing knowledge, it is shown that validity of data can no longer be tied to a detached process of scientific rationality. The following research is thus a process that strives for honesty rather than neutrality; one in which I as a researcher am present and active, rather than obscured or neutralised. As such the research process is one of dialogue and social action; one that necessarily entails the integration of theory and practice and supports clear

social goals. I take the following challenge proposed by Gitlin and Russell (1994), and strive towards their aims.

In essence, the challenge for those working on alternative methodologies is to work simultaneously at the level of method and within the community. Only then can changes in work structures and widely held beliefs complement the influence of method in furthering educational understanding and more just relations. (p.201)

It is to a description of the research that I now turn. I begin with some general comment and a brief explanation of the wider investigations that have contributed to the current study – the literature, practical experiences, and research that have provided the broad base from which I have been able to focus my study. The emphasis in this section, however, is on the investigation of two educational initiatives – the techniques employed, and the research relationships built.

In the interest of preserving clarity of argument, I focus on what I have done rather than dwelling upon those techniques that I have rejected. In Chapters 4 and 7 I make reference to various techniques that I felt were damaging or otherwise inappropriate, and a critique of my own approach and techniques is raised again in chapters 5 and 6.

Data collection

Through the integration of theory and practical experience, the thesis draws upon a wide array of data. As Chapter 1 illustrates, a considerable volume of experience that has been influential on this study falls outside that which is formally presented as field work. Over the course of the PhD study, I have contributed to a variety of cross-cultural exchanges both as a participant and

as an organiser. I have not conducted formal field studies in every instance, but I have observed or acted with critical judgement and have made records where points of interest have arisen. All these experiences have contributed to the ongoing research dialogue and have been influential in leading me to develop the research as I have. Although the particular emphasis in my reporting is on the two initiatives described below, there have been experiences related to other projects that have brought significant changes to my opinion. For example, as I show in Chapter 4, it was during an exchange project in Romania that I became aware of the problematic tendency for some prejudice reduction exercises to be counter-productive.

Also, what began as fieldwork has not always been made use of in the manner in which it was intended. The most significant such incident is described in Chapter 1 where field work experience relating to a practical school-linking initiative brought about a fundamental challenge to my assumptions and caused me to reformulate my research. Although I did not experience another such significant alteration to the topic of my research, the process has been one of continual evolution. I take this as a positive factor, believing it to show a true learning experience, and one demonstrating a responsive approach to research.

There is one further element of my fieldwork that features little in the thesis, though it led me to significant discoveries that are further discussed in Chapter 7. With the belief that I should make a concession to the general preoccupation with the idea that research should be generalisable, I planned

to support my action research projects with questionnaire⁹ findings. I had been impressed by the wealth of material on the web relating both to electronic and face-to-face exchange and was attracted by the potential of an Email survey to probe the ideas of practitioners in relation to good practice in cross-cultural exchange and evaluation.

From the outset I came across barriers to generalisability – conventional sampling was clearly not possible given that the whole population could not be determined. This problem was made worse when, despite a successful piloting of the survey, response rates to the final survey were poor. However, of more interest is the fact that attempts to analyse the data collected led me to believe that such a survey could not produce the meaningful, generalisable data I was seeking. It began to develop a seemingly endless list of categories of things that had contributed to the success of projects. There was very limited overlap between projects. While, at first, this was an object for concern, it led me to alter my enquiry in a significant manner. I began to question whether it might be possible to provide a meaningful set of conditions or techniques that lead to good practice, and, instead, turned greater attention to understanding the processes by which good practice might be implemented. Ultimately, I have come to conclude that the lack of overlap can be seen as a positive factor for, as I expand upon in Chapter 7, good practice is necessarily dependent on the particular.

⁹ The questionnaire is appended. Appendix A is the pilot questionnaire, while Appendix B is the final version.

To make only limited reference to this questionnaire, is thus a positive thing – a demonstration of how it contributed to the learning process. However, I am left with one ethical concern that is yet to be resolved. While I responded personally with thanks to those that completed my questionnaire, given the conclusions drawn above, I have not yet been able to provide those that requested it with a summary of my findings. This is a matter that I hope to resolve, although somewhat belatedly, by contacting those concerned with a brief summary of the thesis and by publishing the complete document on the internet where they might get access to it.

Having devoted so much space to what I have not made use of and what I have used in a limited capacity, I now go on to describe the main fieldwork projects on which the thesis has drawn. Chapters 5 and 6 each revolve about a different action research project, *Celebrate!* and *Walking through windows*, respectively. Neither is presented as a conventional case study, both being an amalgamation of theory and practice; an illustration both of a dynamic research process and of theory in action. Hence, no claims over generalisability are made. I introduce the projects below though they receive a fuller description in the chapters devoted to them.

Celebrate!

This project emerged as a result of a year's collaboration between myself, a Religious Education (RE) teacher and his middle school students. During that time we built various inter-school links both in relation to my initiatives and those presented to the school by others. I established a good relationship with

the teacher and a large number of students as we engaged in these activities. *Celebrate!* emerged as an idea during a discussion between me and the RE teacher concerning how we might advance the school links we had been working on. As such it was a truly collaborative initiative, and one that was motivating to the students not least because it is an Internet project.

The project is still ongoing, though currently less active than it was for the first year of its operation, and there are plans for future development of the website. Throughout that first year I worked extensively with the school in which the project originated, both within curriculum subject time and as an extra-curricular activity. Additionally, I was in contact with and received contributions from students and teachers in a dozen more countries.

This project has been one that has evolved in interaction with theory, as Chapter 5 demonstrates. Given this, it was not possible to be sure from the outset the exact manner in which the project would contribute to the research. Ultimately it has adopted an illustrative function and, as such, draws upon unconventional data sources. The majority of the information that I have used has come from three sources in addition to my general observations: the project website and the participants' contributions to it; Email correspondence; and a project report written jointly by me and the key teacher 5 months into the project.

Walking through windows

This second study contains more of the elements one might expect from a traditional case study. The data collection techniques employed were a

combination of participant observation and interviews. I made detailed field notes recording the workshop sessions that took place over the course of this nine-day European Youth exchange project. Additionally, I made audio recordings of some of the workshop sessions, and of the participants' comments in the evaluation session. This information was supported by extensive interviewing, and participation in the pre- and post-session meetings held by the directors of Beavers Arts, who were running the programme. The interviews were informal and those conducted throughout the project were with one or more of the three directors, and revolved around discussion of workshops recently completed or about to take place. Following a preliminary analysis of this data, an extended group interview was conducted with the directors in relation to the issues that had come to light. The study also draws upon wide-ranging documents about the organisation and its work, not to mention the knowledge that I have accrued over the years that I have known the directors and have been involved with the organisation.

Clearly, given the last statement, my role was not a neutral one. This is not something for which I make an apology, indeed the research was only possible because of this. It was made quite clear to me that I would not have been welcomed as a researcher, particularly at the planning meetings had I not been "me" and had I not had sufficient previous involvement with the organisation to understand how to interpret the directors' "short-hand" discussions. Importantly, this was also seen as a beneficial process to the directors who are seeking ways of processing their fifteen years' worth of

experience as a company in a manner that the skills they have developed might be shared.

Confidentiality and consent

In accord with the differing needs and interests of those collaborating in the research, I have developed different means of responding to issues of consent and confidentiality.

We emphasise that confidentiality is not simply a mechanical procedure but a continuous methodological concern closely related to the values contained and communicated by the research. (Walker, 1993, p.189)

Confidentiality, I argue, should be as much a thinking and responsive process as any other aspect of research. This has led me to a somewhat complex response, as I will describe below.

In relation to the *Celebrate!* project I have maintained confidentiality throughout, taking care to eliminate personal details and presenting the project under a pseudonym. I felt that, although the material that I made use of in the research was prepared for the public domain (to go on the website), confidentiality was essential because, due to the nature of the project, it was not possible to establish consent with every participant. The following quote shows very aptly the concerns I share:

In ethnographic styles of research in particular it is often the case that the focus of the research is not completely clear at the beginning of the research - both topic and methods may change as the research progresses. A solution to this problem may be to re-negotiate consent over the course of the research, but continually drawing participants' attention to the research may disrupt the routine activities that the researcher wants to study and interfere with the development of the participant role he/she may be trying to cultivate. [...] A further problem

is that much research in schools involves a large, and often fluid, group of participants. The main subjects of the research may, for example, be teachers but information about children may also be important. In these circumstances it is often impractical to provide information to, and seek the consent of, all participants. And attempting to explain the research and gain the consent of new participants every time they appear on the scene would clearly be highly disruptive. (Foster, 1999)

Additionally, given the school's previous involvement with the University, while no promise of confidentiality was made, it was a tacit agreement. I have veiled all other contributions from earlier fieldwork with confidentiality out of respect for the participants' privacy.

However, in contrast, *Walking through windows* appears under its true name as does Beavers Arts. The directors, also named, were clear that they wanted their contributions acknowledged, and, moreover, were concerned that the use of pseudonyms (particularly in the case of project titles) would detract from the study. Additionally, I was keen to acknowledge original sources of various documents cited. This did raise ethical issues where the participants were concerned, particularly so because although I had been open about my role as a researcher I had not actively sought consent as this would have been disruptive to the project (see Foster, 1999). As the main focus of the research is on the directors and no discriminating or personal information is offered about the participants, the decision was taken to make use of the real names so far as the organisation, the project and the directors were concerned. However, to be certain of maintaining an ethical stance the names of participants on the project are eliminated.

Reconstructing a future

The preceding discussion of confidentiality and consent is indicative of the responsive approach advocated throughout the chapter. I have made the case for an intelligent research practice founded on clearly defined beliefs and principles and firmly guided by the particularities of the context in which it develops. Research as I have presented it is necessarily a personal, dynamic, non-linear process. It is not therefore amenable to notions of validity as defined by scientific rationality, and cannot be compressed into convenient step-by-step processes. However, I have also made clear that this is not to advocate unscrupulous practice or a lack of planning. Rather, the non-essentialist research model described strives towards an ethical research process that overcomes the universalist/relativist divide through its positive and reconstructive approach founded in dynamic action.

All of the chapters that follow integrate theory and practice in a wide-ranging discussion focused upon non-essentialism as a means of undermining group-based discrimination in education. There are clear parallels to be drawn between the research processes presented above and the educational ones that I go on to advocate. The next chapter lays the foundations for a responsive approach to education, an approach implemented within a flexible framework and teaching non-essentialist conceptualisations of difference.

Chapter 3: Education, essentialism, and group-based prejudice

Unless we can educate children and adults to value their own cultures and those of others and sensitise them to the unavoidable pluralism that we all live in now - a fearsomely difficult task - the alternative is terrifying to contemplate. (Grant, 1997, p.11)

This fear cannot be ignored at a time when the worst consequences of racism are realised through tragic events such as the murder of Stephen Lawrence. Such highly publicised (and politicised) incidents inevitably, and quite rightly, steer public policy making. The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (McPherson, 1999) was not unusual in proposing educational reform as part of a long-term strategy for a future less plagued by discrimination. However, it is not only such crisis-driven reports that are proving influential. The recent controversial report *The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain* (Runnymede Trust, 2000) reiterates the inbuilt inequalities, prejudices and intolerances that Britain must overcome if it is to become an egalitarian, multicultural society. Equally, as across Europe the trend towards greater cooperation accelerates, the Council of Europe (2000a) is among those keen to stress the widely acknowledged role of education in combating racism and intolerance.

I begin the chapter with a brief look at social and cultural reproduction and the particular role education is presumed to play in developing young people's understandings and attitudes. I argue that in order to understand the perennial problems faced by educators attempting to promote tolerance, there is a need to explore further the nature of discrimination, which becomes the next topic of my enquiry. In particular I expand upon the issues uncovered in Chapter 1

through examining the relationship between conceptualisation of group-based identities and prejudice. The tendency to perpetuate a notion of humanity as divided into distinct homogeneous groups (whatever labels we then attach to them) is a problem, and one which needs to be considered in relation to educational initiatives.

With this in mind, I give an historical overview of some key educational approaches – their origins and aims as well as their critiques - from the Second World War to the present day. Of particular concern has been the unfulfilled promises of multicultural and antiracist education, and, more alarmingly, their apparent capacity to reinforce essentialist conceptualisations of groups. The Blair Government's rhetoric appears full of similar promises that await the test of time.

The discrepancy between theory and practice, or promise and reality, has long been recognised as problematic and fierce debates continue over the basis of good practice. I conclude the chapter with an outline of some of the challenges educators face in the light of the preceding debate, and express the need to consider further certain conceptual areas to address these.

Education and social/cultural reproduction

Whichever label we choose to adopt - nationalism, racism, ethnocentrism or xenophobia - the divisive accompaniments to exclusivist conceptions of collective identities have long been a cause for concern. Not surprisingly, then, significant attention has been paid to the foundations upon which these phenomena are built.

Some would insist that the daily routines of our lives are imbued with reinforcements to our sense of nationhood. Billig (1995) in his influential work *Banal Nationalism*, locates the social processes which embed notions of national identity in contemporary consciousness. He argues that national belonging is perpetually “flagged” in a variety of media through routine symbols and habits of speech. The very notion of national consciousness as well as our national affiliation is reinforced by the media, by political rhetoric and by the context in which we live our every-day lives. Billig contends that this reproduction of national identity is, for the large part, taken-for-granted and, as such, unrecognised.

The already politically contentious issue of national reproduction becomes more so in the realm of education. Schools, perceived as significant players in the development of children’s perceptions, are the focus of much debate on this issue. Bernstein (1996) proposes that the school assists in the inculcation of such ‘ideological habits’, stating that, ‘in all modern societies the school is the crucial device for writing and re-writing national consciousness’ (p.10). The work of Coulby (1997), Crawford (1996), Beck (1996) and Troyna and Hatcher (1991) is broadly supportive of this position. This is not however a newly conceived idea. In the nineteenth century, for example, Durkheim had already begun this process of examining the role of education in the development of young people’s understandings about the world, their construction of their own identities, and their attitudes to others. In the UK since the Second World War a variety of concerted efforts has been made to tackle exclusivist xenophobic or nationalist interpretations of the world.

However, the means by which education should develop tolerance and understanding or a more egalitarian society have long been contested. Further, the effectiveness of any of the approaches adopted is open to debate. Such tragedies as murder of Ahmed Ullah at Burnage High School in 1986, rather cruelly bring the shortcomings of antiracist and multicultural education to the public eye.

In making the case for a newly developed approach to multicultural and antiracist education, May (1999a) exposes that, 'Over the years multicultural education has promised much and delivered little.' (p.1). While multicultural education has claimed to establish more positive and harmonious interaction across cultures, it is contended that there has been a disjuncture between educational aims and reality, and that the impact of multicultural education appears negligible (Rattansi, 1992; May, 1999a).

In order to explore meaningfully the difficulties educationalists have experienced in combating group-based prejudice, it is important to understand further that prejudice itself. Whichever expression one chooses - racism, ethnocentrism, nationalism - these *isms* are as complex and contested as the terms to which they relate. What interests me however, is not the semantic debates over the nuances of the differences in meaning related to each term, but a conceptual debate that addresses the foundations on which such exclusivist notions are constructed. I would like to address why, in spite of the intended outcomes, multicultural and antiracist education appear to share with the cultural restorationist movement the potential to perpetuate societal

division and to essentialise difference (May, 1999a and 1999b). I precede this with an exploration of the relationship between conceptualisation and prejudice to form the foundations of the ensuing critique of past developments in education.

Conceptualisation and prejudice

Racial prejudice is the holding of negative attitudes which are linked with and may result in harmful actions towards people on grounds of race (Taylor, 1986, p.73)

Such a simple statement, while it might be assumed “we all know what it means”, fails to acknowledge the complexities inherent in group-based prejudice. First if “race” is, as I demonstrated in Chapter 1, a contested term then by definition so is “racism”. Perhaps more important, is the wide acceptance that it is more accurate to talk in terms of racisms; to view the concept in the plural rather than as an homogeneous whole.

As early as 1978, Zubaida noted in a seminal essay that, ‘the construction of “nationalism” as a unitary object of sociological investigation is not a viable enterprise.’ (p.58). A similar interpretation of “racism” has achieved greater significance with the development of the so-called “new racism” of the New Right. ‘Racism was no longer considered a matter of prejudice (as manifest in negative stereotypes) or of hierarchy, but was seen instead as a desire to protect the cultural integrity of the nation.’ (Short and Carrington, 1996, p.65). However, such cultural racism cannot easily be separated from more traditional scientific/biological racisms. Both are complex and merit referral in the plural; to talk in terms of a binary division between the two serves to

homogenise both (Rattansi, 1999). This argument becomes all the more pertinent when taking a broader look at the interrelated notions of “racism”, “nationalism”, and “ethnocentrism”.

The conceptual foundations of prejudice

The debates surrounding the conceptualisation of prejudice (whether manifest as “racism”, “nationalism”, “ethnocentrism”, “xenophobia”, or indeed any other form of group-based prejudice) are convoluted and extremely complex. Diverse interpretations it seems attract an even greater diversity of criticisms. However, prejudice is commonly perceived as originating from essentialist conceptions of collective identity. This can be connected to universalism - central to the modernist task of nation-building. As such, this equates to the notion of a world divided into predetermined categories; a transcendental order. It is this claim to the natural status of categories that in the past has justified domination of certain categories over others (Jackson and Penrose, 1993).

Nationalism is the political belief that some group of people represents a natural community. (Robertson, 1985, p.225)

Indeed, nationalist ideology is dependent on a specified natural essence on which national coherence is built (Zubaida, 1978). Equally, nationalism depends upon a universal acceptance of the concept of nation itself.

Nationalism involves assumptions about what a nation is: as such, it is a theory of community, as well as a theory about the world being 'naturally' divided into such communities.(Billig, 1995, p.63)

Nationalism (and I believe the same is true of racism and ethnocentrism) relies upon a clear conception of a world divided into predetermined groups, clearly defined by natural essences. While I have shown this to be supported by a universal framework, it appears that essentialism and prejudice are also possible within a relativist framework.

The absolute denial of a common truth and of universal values may easily lead to the denial of a shared nature among the participants of incommensurable cultures. From here it is only a small step to racism which takes the form of constituting the other as absolutely different, as having different (and usually inferior) standards of humanity. (Larrain, 1994, p.31)

Such cultural relativism appears to conceal a deep racism operating under the guise of pluralism. Zec (1980) in his early critique of multiculturalism, takes this argument further to suggest that relativism is antithetical to understanding (and therefore respect) of another culture. 'So respect for other cultures is only possible for a non-relativist; for someone who from where he stands sees something in another culture and values it.' (p.81). It appears that he advocates the notion of essentialist groups.

While relativism might initially be associated with pluralism for its recognition of difference, it seems there is only a fine line to cross before this becomes a recognition of difference in essentialist terms. A recognition of the culturally specific that prompts reductionist notions of culture.

Equally, those combating oppression do not necessarily deconstruct damaging essentialist conceptualisations. Indeed they may serve to perpetuate them. This, in common with the arguments laid out above, relates

well to other aspects of social categorisation. Cockburn (1998) is critical of the way in which some feminists fight their cause on essentialist grounds:

When they invoke “woman” as a collective social actor she is given a primordial meaning, someone “naturally” different from (and better than) men, This is an ideology every bit as immobilizing and divisive as essentialist constructions of the nation.’(Cockburn, 1998, p. 343/44).

Gilroy (2000) is equally clear in his understanding that the modern notion of “race” cannot in any ethical way be defended. He maintains that the only ethical response to contemporary complex racialization is to call for freedom from something greater than white supremacy - for freedom from the very concept of racialization, from 'racialized thinking and racialized thinking about thinking' (p.40).

I share Gilroy's (2000) view that ethnic absolutism ignores the divisions within the black community - further exposed by contemporary consumer culture - and enforces the perception that “race” is the most significant means of division.

ethnic absolutism has joined with nostalgic nationalisms and argued that “race” remains the primary mode of division in all contemporary circumstances, that a unitary black culture is still essentially intact, and that an identifiable pattern of bodily experiences and attributes can serve to connect blacks regardless of their wealth or their health, their gender, religion, location, or political and ideological habits. (ibid., p.254)

This misconception is one shared by many, black and white alike.

It appears that, whatever the intentions (racist or antiracist), an essentialist conceptualisation of collective identities can serve to reinforce difference with negative effect. This raises the question of what education should be doing to

combat group-based prejudice, and provides a view from which to consider educational policies and practices of the past and future.

Educational approaches

While the emphasis has shifted in reflection of the political climate, there has long been a trend of challenging group-based prejudice through a variety of educational practices. Much of current focus in Britain is on Europe and the establishment of European citizenship, but this has not always been the case.

Singh (1997) writes that this trend in education was triggered in the mid twentieth century following the devastation of the Second World War. Education had a significant role in the drive to promote fundamental human values as manifest in the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights. By the 1960s, however, the increased scale of migration had led to significant educational developments in both Britain and America. Mounting concern over the emerging "problem" of immigrants brought about a redirection in the focus of policy in the 1960s (Rattansi, 1992). Indeed, this is where many contemporary theories of multicultural education find their roots.

The contemporaneous projects of multicultural and antiracist education were not without their significant differences, as I demonstrate below. However both movements have been credited with making significant gains in overcoming the problematisation of the "immigrant population". The British 1976 Race Relations Act is notable for its outlawing of racial discrimination and the foundation of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). The Swann Report

(see below) was significant in shifting the apportioning of blame away from minorities, and was a landmark in educational change.

The Thatcher administration, on the other hand, ascribed multicultural and antiracist education to the “loony left”, and did not hesitate to undermine such initiatives (see for example Ball, 1994). Although there was a multifaceted approach to this, cultural restorationism seems to have been prominent in the rhetoric of the Right, and moves were thus made to reinstate the importance of British culture. The jury is out on the present government's non-contentious education for citizenship, which appears to embody many of the values of multicultural education.

With the above overview in mind, I now begin to look critically at past policies and practice in order to demonstrate the origins of contemporary debate.

Multicultural education

Historically, multicultural education has been predicated on the assumption that prejudice against minorities is the result of ignorance. (Short and Carrington, 1996, p.72)

Working from this belief, it is logical to conclude that prejudice can be countered though increasing awareness and understanding of minority cultures. Multicultural education is focused upon the need to combat individual prejudice and improve the self-image of minority group members, through celebrating diversity and overcoming ignorance through the provision of culturally inclusive curricula. Thus, much of the emphasis of multicultural education has been on curriculum development, multi-faith teaching being a prime example of this and one flagged in the Swann Report.

The Swann Report

The Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Minority Groups (more commonly referred to as the Swann Report) was published in Britain in 1985 and appears to mark a key moment in the development of multi-cultural education. The inquiry was set up in 1979 following concern over the "underachievement" of children of West Indian descent. For the first time the need to address issues of "race" relations in education was formalised. Also, despite the contrasting impression generated by the title, the Report is said to mark a shift in the apportioning of blame:

Swann, however obliquely and weakly, had begun to chip away at the common sense attribution of "race" problems simply to a black presence. (Rattansi, 1992, p.12)

Taylor (1986) summarises the intentions of the Swann Report. She states that its aim is to achieve education for all by way of changing the attitudes of the majority and giving everybody the opportunity to fulfil their potential. The role of education is to generate the foundations of a pluralist society. Central to achieving these goals is the promotion of multicultural understanding.

The Curriculum

In keeping with its multicultural approach to education, the Swann Report places much emphasis on curriculum reform. Generally speaking, the importance of the curriculum is widely assumed. Coulby (1997), for example, claims the school curriculum provides 'one of the costumes which the state adopts to attempt to disguise itself as a nation' (p.31). Drawing upon examples from across Europe, he notes that history teaching, with its overwhelming concentration on national events, may be central to this

process of obfuscation. Similarly, geography curricula can also play a part in the reproduction of national consciousness by providing school students with 'a snapshot of where the state locates itself in world politics, trade and culture' (ibid., p.37).

Crawford (1996) reiterates a common goal of multicultural educators in his plea for a 'curriculum that reflects, values and includes the rich diversity of differing cultural heritages and which is relevant and responsive to that range of socio-economic, political, moral and cultural issues which make society so uneasy with itself.' (p.220). Although the ferocity of debates surrounding it could lead one to assume strong links between the curriculum and the emerging opinions of young people, multiculturalists have been criticised for their curriculum focus. It should, then, be borne in mind that 'Xenophobic curricula do not necessarily produce state nationalism' (Coulby, 1997, p.33). And likewise that, 'A pluralist, tolerant curriculum will not necessarily serve to reduce xenophobia and nationalism' (ibid.).

Critiques

There have been many and varied critiques of multicultural education. However, I think it is significant to note three broad lines of attack. First, for those sharing with multiculturalists a faith in the power of the curriculum, but with a different political agenda, comes scare mongering over the damaging effects of a multicultural curriculum. The second attack is levelled by those who question the power of the curriculum to address inequality. Finally, there

are those who propose that multiculturalism serves to perpetuate prejudice and societal division.

Supporters of the first argue that multiculturalism destabilises the nation through its recognition of minority identities. Thus, multiculturalism is attacked by those who, in their desire to preserve orthodox liberalism, believe in the necessity of the nation for personal autonomy and common citizenship (May, 1999b). Such arguments lie at ease with New Right conceptions of nation and the project of cultural restorationism, explored below.

The second critique is more at home in the political Left. It is argued that multiculturalism in its naivety fails to address the central issues of racism. For example, May (1999a) states that past problems have been too much focus on curriculum and a lack of recognition of structural racism.

Third is the allegation that cultural essentialism adopted by racists also haunts the multiculturalist project:

This naïve, static and undifferentiated conception of cultural identity, and the allied notion of the incommensurability of cultures, end up being not that dissimilar from the new racisms of the Right. (May, 1999b, p.12)

Multicultural education can be viewed as perpetuating the understanding of a world divided into monolithic groups. While the intention may be to promote harmony and the objective to do so by celebrating diversity and promoting positive images, this is not necessarily as desirable as it may first appear. This can result in the promotion of oversimplified notions of group divisions

and of intra-group homogeneity, which ultimately can only serve to reify difference.

McLaren and Torres (1999) contend that such oversimplification seriously disables the capacity of multicultural education to effect significant change. This is particularly so when considered in relation to the conceptualisation of racism(s):

A lack of political imagination in current discussions of multicultural education is evidenced by an emerging discourse on the politics of difference that continues to be anchored in a black-white binarism. (McLaren and Torres, 1999, p.45)

This limited vision results, they argue, in the camouflaging of the specificity of racisms across the globe and in relation to the cultural/political climate.

Much contemporary English-language anti-racism appears to be structured around the conviction that “real” racism is about what whites do to non-whites. What the Serbs and Albanians, English and Scots, Christians and Muslims do to each other is something different, something of less consequence. (Bonnett, 2000, p.119)

Ultimately, argues Hewitt (1996), multiculturalism might have fared better had it been founded on a more realistic, complex interpretation of cultural difference.

Antiracist education

Antiracism finds its origins in a Neo-Marxist critique of British multiculturalism. The early British antiracist movement based the critique of multicultural education on its apparent inability to tackle structural factors, and, thus, its inevitable failure to change the life chances of minorities, or to disturb the hegemony of the majority (May, 1999b). Antiracist education moves away

from a concern with achievement of minorities and aims to address issues of structural and institutional racism. Attention is then drawn to such matters as exposing the hidden curriculum, and removing inbuilt inequalities (e.g. in assessment). More radical antiracists might also argue that education has a duty to teach children to understand and resist racially exploitative social structures and capitalism.

Critiques

The previous sentence alone is sufficient to conjure an idea of the opposition antiracists are likely to prompt from those on the political Right. However it is not only the socialist, revolutionary aspect of antiracism that has warranted critique. Those sharing ostensibly the same aims as antiracists (the desire for social equality) may feel justified in harbouring resentment against antiracism as a movement. This is on the grounds that, in Britain, and, some would argue, beyond, there has been an almost unbridgeable divide between antiracism and multiculturalism, which can be assumed to have hindered progress in the struggle for greater equality.

Most seriously, in my opinion, is the tendency of antiracism to reduce racism to a black-white dichotomy. The antiracists' greater direct acknowledgement of power relations and structural inequalities has tended towards a privileging of "colour racism" which fails to give due consideration to the complexity of racisms and their relations to other inequalities (Carrington and Bonnett, 1997). The particular concern this brings about is over the resultant incapacity of antiracism to respond to the "new" or cultural racism of the New Right.

the tendency has been for anti-racist education to treat otherness as essentially a question of "race" rather than culture. (Short and Carrington, 1996, p.67)

Bonnett (2000) identifies essentialism, and the notion of fixed racial essences, as a tool upon which antiracists have relied to combat discrimination. Characteristic of this, he continues, is the use of racial categories which, however employed, serve to perpetuate racialisation. Gilroy, in making a similar claim, also expresses concern that antiracism is increasingly devoid of ethical considerations.

Revitalizing ethical sensibilities in this area requires moving away from antiracism's tarnished vocabulary while retaining many of the hopes to which it was tied. (Gilroy, 2000, p.6)

On a positive note, Gilroy comments that those traditionally subordinated by racialisation have now embraced it as a means of empowerment. However, he continues, they need to be convinced that overcoming racialization need not necessarily imply a loss of the associated solidarity. A persuasive argument to this end is the recognition that notions of racial hierarchy can be more effectively challenged once the concept of "race" is rendered obsolete.

Challenges from the New Right

While reductionist or essentialist conceptualisations of difference may be a bi-product of more liberal educational intentions, it appears that those to the Right (particularly the New Right) consciously embrace reductionism, and keenly promote notions of cultural homogeneity. This is particularly evident in the cultural reconstruction of "Britishness" or even of "Englishness".

In grouping “challenges from the New Right”, I recognise the danger of creating a perception of an homogenous group of individuals with a shared stance against multicultural and antiracist education. This clearly is not the case; indeed, in the contemporary climate of a “pick and mix” politics governed by soundbites, political orientation is less and less useful as a predictor of issue based belief. However, I believe it is useful to draw together various strands which can be associated with right wing politics as a means of exploring the systematic attempts that have been made to undermine the egalitarian intentions of multicultural and antiracist educators. First, I introduce the project of cultural restorationism, commonly associated with the neo-conservative politics of the New Right (indeed Ball (1994) equates cultural restorationist with neo-conservative). Following this, the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) is briefly considered as probably the most significant Conservative educational reform, and one that was seen to cement an ongoing attempt to undermine the goals of multicultural and antiracist education.

Cultural restorationism

Cultural restorationism, a movement that originated in Thatcherism but came to fruition under Major (Ball, 1994), emerged from a growing fear of cultural crisis and the undermining of a singular “British identity”. Troyna and Hatcher (1991) identify two key interrelated factors that arose from the feared cultural crisis:

- the “British character” needs protection from the *threat* of other cultures

- progressive educators have undermined the central role of education in the process of cultural reproduction

From these beliefs stemmed 'the construction of a new ideology of "nation" based on the restoration of an in fact mythical relationship between society and history, elaborating themes first brought to prominence by Enoch Powell.' (Troyna and Hatcher, 1991, p.288).

Conservative commentators assume the given nature of common culture and thus generate a dichotomy:

Ethnic minorities must either give up their cultural and linguistic identities or prejudice both the social cohesion of the nation-state and the possibilities of their own individual social and economic success. (May, 1999b, p19)

In common with multiculturalists, stress was laid upon the pivotal role of the curriculum, hence attempts at an historical reconstruction of nationhood. This appears to have been as much the case in the 1990s as it was in the 1980s when the National (quickly dubbed *nationalist*) Curriculum was first conceived. As Ball (1994) puts it the chief objective is "'de-pluralization"; the articulation of a classless and monoethnic society with a common, transcendent culture.' (Ball, 1994, pp.6/7).

Addressing the, now defunct, School Curriculum and Assessment Authority's conference on *Culture, Curriculum and Society* in February 1996, Tate, the Government's chief curriculum adviser, argued that:

the cultural dimension of the curriculum needs to be firmly and proudly based in a cultural heritage that has its roots in Greece and Rome, in Christianity and in the many-sided traditions of European civilisation.

Beck (1996) criticises Tate for linking (in a number of highly-publicised statements from 1994 onwards) the 'themes of culture and social cohesion to the idea that the curriculum should foster a clear sense of *British* cultural identity' (p.172). Motives have changed little it seems from those perceived to have driven the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988.

Despite this curricular focus, cultural restoration has used many tools to aid its mission. The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) lent its favour to restorationist politics not only through the introduction of the National Curriculum, but the development of an educational market reinforced by assessment procedures and educational strategies.

The 1988 ERA

The 1988 Education Reform Act was viewed by many as the last of a series of efforts through which the liberal focus, promoted throughout the 1980s by Swann and others, was challenged by the Conservative government. (Rattansi, 1992, p.13).

As mentioned above, this was witnessed in terms of the curriculum:

Ethnic and cultural diversity are made invisible by the recomposition of Englishness within the National Curriculum. An imaginary past of national glories and civilising influence is to serve as a model and guardian for the future. (Ball, 1994, p.6)

Despite such concerns over the curriculum, it seems that the consequences of such restorationist ambitions have not always been as negative as feared:

Education for citizenship has become a key concern for educational policy and debate in the advanced economies of the English-speaking world, where education systems and agencies have produced reports,

curriculum guidelines, and school programs in surprising number. (Gilbert, 1996, p.42)

Both the National Curriculum Council's (1990) guidelines on *Education for Citizenship* and the Office for Standards in Education's (OfSTED) subsequent advice to schools on *Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development* (OfSTED, 1994) can also be read as embodying a pluralist, global outlook. The former contends that children should be encouraged to view citizenship 'as something which extends beyond their immediate experiences and relationships' to incorporate 'relationships with national, European and world-wide communities' (NCC, 1990, p.15). Similarly, OfSTED enjoins schools to encourage children to develop an understanding of 'the diversity of religious, social, aesthetic, ethnic and political practices - nationally and internationally' (1994, p. 17).

However, the underlying structural alterations brought about by the ERA may be less innocent. With the introduction of Local Management of schools (LMS) the ERA removed power from Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and saw the state endowed with new control. In particular this saw the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) which, though not uncriticised, was perceived as a leader in multicultural and antiracist education (Figueroa, 1999).

This also served to launch school education into the market place - a significant step towards an education system which 'achieves commonality by division and legitimates difference by the ideology of choice.' (Ball, 1994,

p.47). Competition has arguably brought about a narrowing vision of educational outcomes, and perpetuated, if not intensified, structural inequality.

In the past, and from across the political spectrum, the relationship between education and cultural and social reproduction has been viewed as significant. Attempts have been made to influence young people and their developing understandings by structural and curricular changes introduced by both the Left and Right. What I now address is the way in which New Labour has responded to its politically contentious inheritance.

New Labour, new dawn?

In 1997 the new government expressed its educational intentions in the White Paper, *Excellence in Schools*. The underlying importance of equal opportunities was stressed, though there was a failure to explore, for example, the implications for citizenship education in a multicultural society (Figueroa, 1999). Barber, the head of the Standards Unit at the Department for Education and Employment, has proposed: 'The role of schools in persuading children to adopt altruistic values was even more important than the economic benefits they could bring by improving literacy and numeracy' (*The Guardian*, 23 March, 1998). A refreshing statement given that it appears that many democratic societies 'have become so preoccupied with the more formal criteria of "performance" and with the bureaucratic demands of education as an institution' (Bruner, 1996, p.39). However, this does not deny the White Paper's narrow focus on education (which is viewed primarily as

preparation for work). Searching for the teeth behind the soundbite seems an ever important task!

Education for Citizenship

Avoiding the much derided and politically bound terms of multicultural and antiracist education, New Labour has focused on Education for Citizenship. Recently, most prominent in this area of educational policy has been the final report of the Government's advisory group on Education for Citizenship, which proposed that:

citizenship education be a statutory entitlement in the curriculum and that all school should be required to show that they are fulfilling the obligation that this places upon them (QCA, 1998, p. 22)

In the UK Education for Citizenship, and beneath that umbrella, "global citizenship", it seems, will provide the philosophical underpinning for New Labour's policy on the school curriculum. Barber has recently called for lessons on 'the ethics of "global citizenship"' to provide the basis of the moral code of the revised school curriculum in England and Wales. Indeed, from August 2002, Citizenship will form one of the foundation subjects of the National Curriculum (QCA, 2000a).

It is evident that serious attempts are being made to ensure that such rhetoric is translated into action. The Department for Education and Employment, in conjunction with the Department for International Development, the Central Bureau for International Education and Training, the Development Education Association, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, has recently published a guidance booklet on the development of a global dimension in the

school curriculum (DfEE et al 2000). The importance of adding a global dimension to learning is stressed:

Including a global dimension in teaching means that links can be made between local and global issues and that what is taught is informed by international and global matters. It also means that young people are given opportunities to examine their own values and attitudes, to appreciate the similarities between peoples everywhere, to understand the global context of their local lives, and to develop skills and understanding to play an active role in the global community. (ibid., p.2)

Education for Citizenship, it should be noted, however, is not inherently driven by a desire to combat ethnocentrism. Indeed quite the opposite could be seen to be true, hence the importance of considering what kind of education for citizenship (and for what kind of citizenship) proliferates. 'Citizenship is a broad, complex and contested term, and programs in education for citizenship vary with the notion of citizenship which underlies them.' (Gilbert, 1996,.p.43).

A number of recent policy documents have emphasised the importance of European identity. For example, the European Commission (1997) has highlighted the part played by education and training both in 'maintaining social cohesion' and in 'constructing European citizenship'. While at first sight this might be seen to broaden the cultural context for education, an alternative reading is possible: education for European citizenship, rather than challenging ethnocentric notions of identity, may merely serve to propagate a new banal (pan)nationalism. Fennes and Hapgood (1997) allude to this possible dilemma when they state that education must prepare children for global citizenship, not a widened European citizenship which merely extends

the boundaries of the nation and keeps the same exclusivist and ethnocentric terms.

The vision of “building a European house” conflicts with the charge that what this amounts to is a “fortress Europe”. Both trends exist. (ibid., p.3)

In promoting a global aspect to education for citizenship, recent policy rhetoric scores highly. Crick and his colleagues urge schools to develop ‘an awareness of world affairs and global issues’ and also advocate that they cultivate ‘a national identity that is secure enough to find a place for the plurality of nations, cultures, ethnic identities and religions long found in the United Kingdom’ (QCA, 1998, p. 17).

While political rhetoric cannot magically become common practice, the significance of efforts to combat ethnocentrism being accorded such a high profile should not be underestimated.

What future?

If, as it appears, the perpetuation of essentialist conceptions of difference is both inaccurate and undesirable, there is a desperate need to reconsider how education can best combat prejudice and inequality. Despite the limited educational success to date, Rattansi (1992) is clear that rather than abandoning the cause we should reassess the approach:

The point is not simply to abandon this type of teaching but to acknowledge and analyse its limitations in the light of a more complex understanding of the nature of racism and to develop forms of educational engagement more likely to open up racist subjectivities and common sense to alternative discourses. (p.33)

As I have argued above, an effective future strategy relies upon a prior problematisation of “race” (and other related concepts). Failure to do so implicitly lends credibility to the notion of a humanity naturally divided into distinct biologically and culturally defined groups (McLaren and Torres, 1999).

There is a need to look beyond multiculturalism and antiracism. In 1992 Rattansi was advocating the need to overcome the limitations imposed by reductionist and essentialist outlooks. This goal is still being grappled for. On an optimistic note, May (1999a), in his introduction to his forward-looking collection *Critical Multiculturalism*, states that we are at a turning point in multicultural and antiracist pedagogy. Hope is on the horizon, for 'the very focus and parameters of the debate have been recast, and many of the perceived weaknesses of past approaches to multicultural education have been, or are now being addressed.' (p.1). The aim of the thesis is to contribute to this development in the area of cross-cultural exchange.

I referred in Chapter 1, to an issue (raised by May, 1999b) of fundamental importance to achieving a non-essentialist development from antiracist or multicultural education: the need to recognise cultural difference, while maintaining a non-essentialist understanding of culture. It is necessary to find a means of combating discrimination that does not at the same time serve to perpetuate it through reinforcing the notion that people can be boxed into convenient categories. May's (1999b) solution lies in the development of what he terms a *non-essentialist politics of cultural difference*. This, he proposes is dependent on recognition of the following considerations:

- the cultural values and practices of the nation-state are not universal and neutral and the dominant culture should not be viewed as “normal”
- cultural differences must be understood in terms of power relations
- a reflexive critique must be maintained and based upon an understanding of culture as dynamic

In short, there is a need to address the structural as well as the personal, and to do so within a framework that recognises the limitations of essentialist or universal constructs. There is a clear general move towards a non-essentialist approach to multicultural/antiracist education expressed in May's (1999a and 1999b) critical multiculturalism, Rattansi's (1999) reflexive multiculturalism, and Carrim and Soudien's (1999) critical antiracism.

In the past, critical approaches have not themselves escaped questioning. The most significant line of attack has been upon their capacity (or lack thereof) to bring about social change and to direct practice (May, 1999a). This is a constraint May addresses explicitly in his refusal to separate theory, policy and practice into distinct areas. In building a critical multiculturalism, May seeks to generate a movement that 'incorporates postmodern conceptions and analyses of culture and identity, while holding on to the possibility of emancipatory politics.' (ibid., pp.7/8). The aim it appears is to benefit from poststructuralist interpretations without conceding the capacity to bring about social change. This seems to be at the heart of the problems educators face - marrying beliefs and theory with action. For example, McLaren and Torres (1999) argue, particularly given the perceived taming of

critical pedagogy, 'It is imperative that critical and multicultural educators renew their commitment to the struggle against exploitation on all fronts.' (p.70).

However, putting theory into practice has always been a testing matter, and notions of what makes the best practice are much contested. Fogelman (1996) writes that research on the use of materials and the teaching of citizenship in schools has been somewhat limited. Additionally (perhaps consequentially), there is a dearth of appropriate teaching materials (Ryba, 1995).

The notion that particular teaching materials may be considered appropriate or inappropriate is again a contested issue. The allegation is that in changing text books educationalists open themselves to the challenge of being labelled totalitarian.

They share the misleading assumption that it is possible to produce a singular, incontestable, objective and accurate representation of the reality external to the literary or photographic or any other text. They thus ignore or obscure a different, more democratic objective: that is, the search for mechanisms for giving voice to a range of representations, and for encouraging a critical dialogue and interrogation of all intellectual and political frameworks. (Rattansi, 1992, p.34)

There is a need to develop a democratic pedagogy that teaches children to actively engage and question, and provides them with the skills to interpret the world flexibly. Hence, McLaren and Torres (1999) highlight the importance of providing students with a language of analysis and critique as well as to sharpen their affective capacity. It is more than a question of knowing about multiculturalism, 'they need to take the required steps towards an embodied

and corporeal understanding of such practice and an affective investment in such practice at the level of every day life such that it deflects the invasive power of capital.' (ibid., p.71). Multiculturalism cannot be learned theoretically, it is something that needs to be embodied in the practices and the ethos of school and society.

Hence, I share Scurati's (1995) belief that in developing cross-cultural education, we should not be seeking to combat stereotypes judged as negative through replacing them with those perceived to be positive.

In this way we would change the contents but certainly not the quality of the message which would remain superficial and which would lead to the establishment of a new conformism. (p.103)

Rather, we need to find a way of overcoming the embedded essentialist constructs of "race" and "ethnicity". This entails change on a structural level and resonates with Fogelman's (1996) claim that citizenship education extends beyond the curriculum and should be a central issue across school life and should consider such issues as the models of tolerance provided, and the handling of discipline.

the consequences of experience upon racialization will depend upon the structure of that experience. If it is structured around race, the racial categories will be made salient and the conditions for racism will exist, if not, other categories will be used to organize cognition and action. (Reicher, 1986, p.166)

However, I end my advice with a note of caution. In overcoming essentialism, it is necessary to be wary of the danger that in destroying the boundaries, one of the limits is also destroyed or consumed by the other (McLaren 1999) – the so-called whitening of identity. Equally, within the current liberal trend towards

social inclusion and education for citizenship, there is the potential that the failure to recognise the particularities of inequalities provides a cover for the reinforcement of privilege.

In the chapter that follows I relate the issues discussed above to the field of cross-cultural exchange. In doing so I provide a critical analysis of the contact hypothesis on which many such educational initiatives have been founded, and propose an alternative direction for future programmes.

Chapter 4: Beyond the contact hypothesis – laying foundations for the future of cross-cultural exchange

One of the many ways in which it has been attempted to transform egalitarian dreams into practical reality is through cross-cultural exchange. Cross-cultural exchange is a term I use to encompass a wide range of communication situations. My particular focus, in contrast to the early proponents of the contact hypothesis (who focused on relationships in everyday life), is on educational initiatives or projects - whether in the formal or non-formal sectors; whether face-to-face meetings or electronic collaborations.

This chapter begins with an historical overview and rationale for such educational initiatives. The optimism attached to cross-cultural exchange, it appears, is as persistent as the contact hypothesis upon which it is commonly founded. If the more wishful commentators were to be believed, some significant contact albeit “of the right sort” with some people who are “different”, would be sufficient to ensure a future of world peace.

Prior to expanding my own critical analysis of the contact hypothesis, I establish the theoretical foundations for doing so. This entails a brief exploration of communication, categorisation, and conceptualisation. I begin with an illustration of processes involved in an interaction between a person and an inanimate object. I make use of this example to suggest that human communication processes are far more complex than the contact hypothesis allows. Also, my brief investigation reveals, communication is dependent on categorisations and generalisations.

Despite the evident association between categorisation and the perpetuation of prejudice, as discussed in earlier chapters, I argue that this need not necessarily stand in contradiction to the need to categorise for communication purposes. Indeed, I go on to argue, this is only so if one employs rigid, essentialist conceptualisations of difference – if the categorisation process is inflexible. This is the basis from which I discuss the tension between, on the one hand, overcoming essentialist conceptualisations of identity, and, on the other, allowing sufficient groundedness to enable communication.

In my view there is a clear need, as argued in Chapter 3, for education that undermines essentialist interpretations of difference. It is with this in mind that I address the contact hypothesis with a more critical eye. In recognition of the fact that cross-cultural exchange initiatives have not always attracted positive assessments, I consider the basis of critiques levelled against this type of educational initiative. The weaknesses that have historically attracted the most attention do not, I argue, emanate from an inherent problem with cross-cultural exchange per se. They are, I demonstrate, more a consequence of the benefits its proponents have traditionally sought to gain from such initiatives. I demonstrate that the contact hypothesis is founded in the perpetuation of essentialist differences, reinforced by questionable teaching and evaluation processes.

I conclude by exploring how good practice in cross-cultural exchange might be developed. I am critical of traditional guidelines founded upon conditions of positive contact. Instead, I propose an alternative basis from which to

approach prejudice reduction that is supportive of non-essentialism. Such a flexible approach, I argue, needs to take account of the complexities of the human communication process and to overcome essentialist definitions of difference.

Setting the scene

Cross-cultural exchange has enjoyed long-standing high regard as a significant aspect of a broader education (see for example, Allport, 1954; Fennes and Hapgood, 1997). International youth cooperation has a history dating back to the mid nineteenth century or beyond (Directorate for Youth and Sport, 1999). The aftermath of the Second World War saw this augmented in the struggle to safeguard a peaceful future (Council of Europe, 2000e). This momentum has been perpetuated by the increasingly prominent role adopted by youth organisations since the 1960s (Directorate for Youth and Sport, 1999). Equally, this has been further supported (in Europe and beyond) by the drive for greater European cohesion. The Council of the European Union and the European Parliament (Europa, 1999; Europa, 2000b), for example, express the need to promote active citizenship, to combat exclusion on any ground and to promote equality of opportunity for all.

In 1994 the European Ministers of Education adopted a resolution on the promotion of European school links as an essential aspect of preparation for life in a democratic multicultural and multilingual Europe. Such principles have been extended into programmes of practical action. In the last five years European education, training and youth programmes have given more than a

million people opportunities in countries other than their own (Europa, 2000a). It is evident, not only from the thirty percent increase in funding reported this year, that significant confidence is held in these programmes:

Recognising their popularity, and seeing in them a very concrete way of promoting European cooperation while improving participants' skills and consequently their employment prospects, the Council and the Parliament have agreed to renew all four programmes for seven years from the year 2000. (Europa, 2000a)

The above mentioned programmes give support (to those that seek it) for initiatives both within formal and informal education. More comprehensive programmes for formal education are supported, in Britain, by the Government as a part of its drive to promote education for global citizenship (see Chapter 3). For example, recent guidance for schools offers advice on, among other things, 'incorporating a global dimension into the wider life of schools, with particular attention being paid to school linking and the opportunities that this offers for learning across the curriculum.' (DfEE et al, 2000, p.1). Likewise, the Central Bureau (2000) in its information sheets on citizenship education places a strong emphasis on the benefits of international links between schools.

It appears that the assumption underpinning Allport's (1954) classical contribution 'that both knowledge about and acquaintance with out-groups lessen hostility toward them.' (p.265), is widely shared almost half a century later. This logical assumption, as translated into the contact hypothesis introduced in Chapter 1, has indeed been a powerful motivational force for cross-cultural exchange for generations. Many cross-cultural exchange

programmes embrace the notion that, 'If only one had the opportunity to communicate with the others and to appreciate their way of life, understanding and consequently a reduction in prejudice would follow.' (Amir, 1998, p.163). It is such sentiments that form the basis of the contact hypothesis, which can be defined as 'the long and widely held belief that interaction between individuals belonging to different groups will reduce ethnic prejudice and intergroup tension.' (Hewstone and Brown, 1986, p.1).

Not only does such a notion have a strong appeal to common sense, but research evidence and logic are also supportive of this premise.

There is an abundance of research evidence to show that facts or information alone about another group are not sufficient to change attitudes towards other people. (Singh, 1997, p.287)

In recognition of the importance of grounding education in children's day-to-day experience and understanding (as demonstrated by Singh, 1997), Albala-Bertrand (1997) is among those who stress the desirability of extending children's practical experiences of the world as far as possible. In his view, the broader the context of practically-based education for citizenship, the greater the scope of the positive effects. This is a view supported by Lukes' (1995) argument:

We can, in the end, only understand the unfamiliar by analogy with the familiar. The important thing is to extend the range of the latter and to discipline the processes of understanding by the use of rigorous and relevant comparative methods. (p.177)

Establishing interaction between people of differing cultures is, thus, a logical means of widening experience. It seems perfectly reasonable to share the following conclusions drawn by Williams (1996).

Cultural exchange can play an important role in the active development of tolerance and flexibility. It can help people to examine their own identity more closely and at the same time help them to gain insight into other people's lives. Cultural exchange is about communication and mutual enrichment through new perspectives and new ideas and can help sustain a living discussion about diversity. (p.9)

It was on such a premise that the 1994 European resolution, referred to above, was founded.

School links can help young people acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to meet the major challenges of European society [...] Experiencing a well prepared international school project, whether it involves an exchange or whether it is based on correspondence or cyber-communication, allows young people to find out about other cultures as well as their own, and it encourages them to be respectful of other people's values and traditions. It helps them to become tolerant and open-minded. (Council of Europe, 2000d)

So compelling is the logic of the contact hypothesis that it has a tendency to become the over-riding basis on which intercultural exchanges are valued. It appears to have hijacked educational debates in this area for a number of decades. Because cross-cultural exchange has come to be so strongly associated with the contact hypothesis (be it by name or by sentiment), it is easy to be led to believe that if evidence demonstrates that the contact hypothesis is failing, then so too is the cross-cultural contact. This fails to recognise first that there may be alternative ways in which such projects can contribute to overcoming prejudice, and secondly that there may be numerous unrelated ways in which they can be beneficial. Given the focus of this thesis, the former is of greater concern, but further attention is also paid to the latter in Chapter 7.

Maintaining attention at present on the contact hypothesis, it is worthy of note that its prominence has tended to bring an inward focus to debates on good practice. Attention, thus, has focused disproportionately on why the contact hypothesis appears not to work in practice; and on how it might be made more effective, both of which I explore below. In Chapters 5 and 6 I explore how, in practice, cross-cultural exchange might work towards prejudice reduction. In doing so, I hope to show how this wider goal of the contact hypothesis might be achieved without connection to its flawed principles. The task for this chapter, then, remains to challenge the very logic of the contact hypothesis, and to establish an alternative framework from which to approach cross-cultural exchange. I begin by contemplating the communication process and its relationship to social categorisation.

Essentialism, categorisation, and communication

Human communication as a subject is both complex and value laden. It is also much commented upon, making it difficult to see beyond many ready assumptions. It is for this reason that I precede a more theoretical discussion with an exploration of interaction and categorisation within a simpler context. It occurred to me that our every motor action requires multiple, sensitive judgements and categorisations, and the unconscious processing of volumes of information, in order that our predictions can lead us to carry out our intended action.

Consider, for example, that you want to pour some milk into your tea. If I am to imagine that you have no physical or sensory impairment, you might look

around for something which you consider to have sufficient of your anticipated qualities of a vessel that might contain milk, your expectations being directed by your past experiences and the context in which you are situated. Following a correct identification, in order to pick up the vessel and transfer some of its contents into your cup, you need to make numerous complex assumptions most of which will be made on an unconscious level. Although, it is possible that they are concepts to which you could not attach a name (never mind consciously know how to calculate their effects), you will rely upon refined predictions of such things as mass and centre of gravity to successfully complete your task. You will have to take into account your past experiences with those objects you perceive (albeit on an unconscious level) to have similar characteristics in terms of the relevant aspects (in this instance, mass for example). So, you might consider the substance from which the vessel is made, its size, whether it is empty or not (based upon visual stimulus or knowledge of the particular object e.g. "I used most of the milk in that carton on my breakfast this morning"), its shape, whether the material from which it is made will provide a good grip, and so the list goes on. Equally you will consider the environmental conditions, or the context, for example the gravitational force, whether the container is wet or not. If you miscalculate you will have to make adjustments if your interaction is to be successful. Should you fail to be quick enough in doing so, you will have to face the consequences – spilt milk?

It might seem a bizarre tangent to consider the mechanical processes of pouring milk within a discussion about human interaction, but I believe that

there are many useful ideas to be drawn from such an exploration. To achieve the desired outcome (milk in tea), there are numerous and complex processes undergone. These include the following: assignment of an object to a pre-existent category perceived to be relevant to the given situation; assumptions perceived to be relevant to the situation made about the nature of the object on several grounds – characteristics associated with objects of that category, characteristics associated with other categories to which that particular object also belongs, characteristics of that particular object, characteristics of such objects in particular conditions. Although, there is a limit to the analogy, I do not think it requires too great a stretch of the imagination to see clear parallels in the human communication process.

This appears to be so even to the extent when we think about what might cause an inharmonious interaction. In the above case there are several grounds upon which an unwanted result might occur: miscategorisation (it is not a milk container); over generalisation (e.g. all plastic containers are of the same mass regardless of any other characteristics); misassociation of characteristics (e.g. this vessel is blue and therefore will be heavier than a green one which is otherwise identical); failure to recognise the individual aspects of the object due to an over-reliance on a pre-conception (e.g. although the vessel appears to be empty, I will assume it is not because it is always full in the morning). Of course, in most cases an unsuccessful interaction can be avoided if rapid adjustments are made to any misconceived generalisations.

If the physical aspect of pouring some milk can involve so many complex processes (and a vast number more than outlined above), and if we are completely unconscious of so many of them, it is clear to me that we should expect to find no simple explanations of human interaction. This is particularly so given the added emotional and social dimensions involved, not to mention the active response of another person. Clearly, this thesis cannot encompass a theory of communication but significant issues can be raised in relation to cross-cultural exchange. I begin with a further investigation of categorisation.

The need to categorise

Interaction, it appears, at whatever level, is dependent on categorisation – ordering the world through pre-existent categories from which we can make assumptions. Indeed, categorisation and connected assumptions (or stereotypes even) are at the heart of the communication process, and are a fundamental component of human existence itself.

It is a commonly held belief (see for example, Allport, 1954; Jenkins, 1997; Poulain, 1997; Kollock and Smith, 1999) that in interacting with others we need to make assumptions based rationally on existent means of categorisation and past experience.

The human mind must think with the aid of categories (the term is equivalent here to *generalizations*). Once formed, categories are the basis for normal prejudgement. We cannot possibly avoid this process. Orderly living depends on it. (Allport, 1954, p.20)

This very process is what characterises human selfhood according to Bruner (1996). Equally, it is such an assumption that leads to Jenkins' conclusion that, 'Socialisation *is* categorisation. It cannot be otherwise.' (1997, p.166).

Every interaction, regardless of with whom we are interacting, is moulded by our understanding of the identity of that person (Kollock and Smith, 1999). Indeed, 'one of the first things we do on meeting a stranger is attempt to locate them on our social maps, to identify them.' (Jenkins, 1996, p.5) for, he continues, 'without delineating social identity and identities, I would be the same as you and neither of us could relate to the other meaningfully, or consistently.' (ibid. p.6).

Poulain (1997) reminds us that every encounter is an interaction, for even a refusal to communicate is itself a communication. It is essential, then, to establish the identity of each person we meet.

in order to communicate it is necessary to know who each of the partners is. What references and implications are coded in their message? Which concepts do they not share? What is known and unknown, shared and not shared, will have to be quickly established, at least in general terms. (Poulain, 1997, p.79)

To do this, states Gudykunst (1998), in communicating we quite naturally rely upon the assumption that people whom we categorise together will be similar.

Once we place people in social categories, our stereotypes of people in those categories are activated. Stereotypes are the mental pictures we have of a group of people. Our stereotypes create expectations about how people from our own and strangers' groups will behave. (Gudykunst, 1998, p.16)

Regardless of whether we perceive another as a member of the same group as us or not, we categorise them in order to form the basis of our initial

communications. Until we become acquainted with somebody, our expectations of them are founded in our understanding of the characteristics of the categories in which we have placed them. Stereotypes, therefore, play a significant part in our initial communications.

Given the vital role that categorisation plays in communication it is important to consider the process of categorisation itself. Thus, prior to considering categorisation and communication in relation to the contact hypothesis, I demonstrate categorisation to be a sophisticated dialogical process, that both reflects and affects its societal and linguistic context. I argue that there are complexities within the categorisation process that must be recognised if the perils of essentialism are to be avoided.

Complexity and the categorisation process

There is a complex mesh of individual, societal and linguistic factors that influence categorisation. Categorisation is not a simple matter of placing people through interaction, in given categories from which generalisations can be made to guide that interaction. Placing an individual in a single sealed category of identity is just not possible. Rather, additional considerations must be taken account of: first that communication and categorisation are interdependent; and secondly that an individual's identity is transient and multidimensional.

Language, as well as a tool for interaction, provides a framework within which interaction operates. Thus the categories embedded in language are crucial to our capacity to interpret the world:

Even so primitive a psychological process as generalization - seeing the similarity between things - is corseted by culturally sponsored constructs of meaning rather than by the churning away of an individual's nervous system. (Bruner, 1996, p.166)

As I showed in Chapter 1, the categories upon which we depend are by no means fixed but are transient and reflect a particular cultural space-time location.

Concepts such as "ethnic", "race", "tribe" and "culture" do not reflect universal and unchanging divisions of humanity. On the contrary, they represent specific, historically contingent ways of looking at the world, which intersect broader social and political relations. (Jones, 1997, p.40)

Social relations contextualised in historical circumstance are what frame human subjectivity (McLaren 1999).

Also every interaction itself has a small role to play in the construction of such specific conceptual frameworks - both the nature and the positioning of categorical boundaries. This is through the application and development of linguistic categories, themselves bound to the medium of communication and the cultural state in which the medium is located.

[...] group identity is characteristically constructed across the group boundary, in interaction with others. Boundaries are permeable, persisting despite the flow of personnel across them, and identity is constructed in transactions which occur at and across the boundary. (Jenkins, 1996, p.24)

The immediate social context guides both the forming and application of any group-based generalisations.

Not only is it important to recognise the categorisation process as context specific, but it is increasingly accepted that individual's identities are shifting

and multifaceted. If we are to heed the words of contemporary commentators, societal context is forcing an ever increasingly complex process of individual identification.

Contemporary societies are pluralistic, multicultural and multiethnic. Within a pluralist democracy national identity is an organic and diverse amalgamation of differing traditions and heritages. Individuals have more than one identity, they grow and develop within contexts which require them to assume differing complementary identities. (Crawford, 1996, p.217)

While one category may be relevant for a particular occasion or to convey a particular meaning, it does not mean it was the only possible category (Cockburn, 1998; Gudykunst 1998).

[...]one is not necessarily affiliated with some single, overarching group that is always able to claim a special and fundamental allegiance that wipes out all other contending claims. It is more important to appreciate that different groups are constituted on different bases that correspond to the various frequencies of address that play upon us and constitute our always incomplete identities in a stable field. (Gilroy, 2000, p.276)

The categorisation process must be flexible in order to reflect this. Moreover, it is not just a question of which particular category may be most salient in a given context, but one of recognising that individuals simultaneously occupy various subject positions (Carlson and Apple, 1998). For example, we are both gendered and racialised, and are thus subject to conflicting power relations.

It does not make sense, and therefore does not benefit communication, to give particular credence to one category over all others. To assume that one element of an individual's identity is a sufficient basis from which to make

assumptions about them is to assume homogeneity of that group. Plainly this is not true.

Can people legitimately be differentiated and categorized in distinct collectivities on grounds of culture? After all, ethnic groups are never entirely homogenous. [...] people of upper and lower social classes in a single ethnic group often have very different cultures. [...] At the cultural edges of an ethnic group the similarities with other ethnicities may be greater than the differences. (Cockburn, 1998, p. 35)

Likewise categories upon which we may have relied heavily in the past may not be salient in contemporary society. Skin colour alone, for example, is extremely limited as a basis from which to generalise.

Today skin is no longer privileged as the threshold of either identity or particularity. There are good reasons to suppose that the line between inside and out now falls elsewhere. The boundaries of “race” have moved across the threshold of the skin. They are cellular and molecular, not dermal. (Gilroy, 2000, p.47)

To take account of this, we need to adopt, claim Carlson and Apple (1998), a less fixed and more multifaceted conception of self. We need to recognise that boundaries between groups are unlikely to be clear-cut, and that our assumptions must be refined.

Essentialist categorisations and prejudice

While categorisation is clearly a central part of human communication, it should not be neglected that it has the potential to cause and perpetuate prejudice. This, I argue, is not an inherent feature of categorisation, but one which emerges within an essentialist framework that ignores the complexities described above. An essentialist framework of categorisation can, it appears,

be as much of a hindrance to successful communication as is the absence of categorisation.

I developed an argument in chapters 1 and 2 to show the causal link between essentialist conceptualisations of identity and group-based prejudice. Essentialism, I argued, forms the root of the very concept of a hierarchically classified society – one comprising distinct homogenous groups.

Stereotypes enable us, as I described above, to make predictions and generalisations in terms of group belonging. This becomes problematic when it leads us to depersonalise individuals and to perceive them first and foremost as members of a group (Gudykunst, 1998). Implicit within such categorisation is the notion of group homogeneity. This is the basis from which it is possible to allow one aspect of identity to over-ride our usual complex judgements of an individual. As such it both generates and is generated by prejudice.

It is in this vein that Gilroy (2000) perceives an absolute rendering of identity as 'a silent sign that closes down the possibility of communication across the gulf between one heavily defended island of particularity and its equally well fortified neighbours' (p.103). Essentialism thus generates an understanding of identity as a shallowly defined destiny.

People become bearers of the differences that the rhetoric of absolute identity invents and then invites them to celebrate. Rather than communicating and making choices, individuals are seen as obedient, silent passengers moving across a flattened moral landscape toward the fixed destinies to which their essentialist identities, their genes, and the closed cultures they create have consigned them once and for all. (ibid., p.104)

Communication, it appears, cannot operate in any meaningful way within such a conceptual framework.

Essentialism undermines the individual and leads to shallow interpretations of others, that ultimately lead to misunderstanding and social division. Prejudice, it appears will never be overcome within a society that insists upon dividing people into rigidly pre-determined categories from which stereotypical assumptions can be made. Social cohesion is dependent on overcoming essentialist divisions and being unhindered by the simplified classification of our conscious minds. It remains to be considered what implications this has for the contact hypothesis.

Essentialism and the contact hypothesis

Perhaps not surprisingly given the ambitious claims made, critiques and uncertainty surrounding the contact hypothesis have a history as long as the theory itself. Pettigrew (1986) is critical of the contact hypothesis on a number of counts. He describes it by stating that it is

at its best a relatively static, middle-range theory of modest scope. It was derived to explain a particular and limited set of conflicting empirical findings in an applied area of interest - changes in intergroup attitudes as a function of intergroup contact under varying conditions. (ibid., p.171)

Although attacks on the contact hypothesis have been many and varied, persistent attention has been paid to one crucial element – generalisation. It is commonly questioned whether in practice positive attitudes to individuals are translated into positive attitudes about groups.

Evidence has been and continues to be uncertain. While findings do lead towards a conclusion that friendly inter-personal contact is linked to more favourable opinions about groups, the direction of the causal link is not so readily apparent (Allport, 1954; Powers and Ellison, 1995).

positive association between contact and positive attitudes reported in cross-sectional studies may reflect primarily a selection effect: Initially tolerant attitudes may lead individuals to engage in, or even seek out, interracial contacts, while less tolerant persons eschew such contacts. (Powers and Ellison, 1995, p.206)

It is such complications that lead Hewstone and Brown (1986) to conclude that, 'Research based on the contact hypothesis has yielded an impressive, if sometimes bewildering, array of data' (p.6). This in turn has augmented what in Chapter 7 I will describe as a misplaced emphasis on determining which conditions of contact produce desirable outcomes.

However, it is not my concern here to examine the intricacies of the hypothesis, but to question its underlying logic. I have recounted the questions and doubts raised above, as they (alongside my personal experiences as discussed in Chapter 1) were what caused me to explore why it is that the contact hypothesis, despite its apparent logic, fails to be fulfilled in practice.

Generalisability

Proponents of the contact hypothesis maintain that interracial contact provides direct information - frequently accurate and favorable information - on the values, lifestyles, and experiences of other groups. This positive firsthand information may be generalized into a positive perception of the group(s) as a whole, thus permitting individuals to counter unfavorable racial and ethnic stereotypes. (Powers and Ellison, 1995, p.205)

Underpinning the contact hypothesis is the belief that interpersonal relationships are at the foundation of intergroup relationships. (Reicher, 1986). This notion, Reicher continues, is contested by some who argue that there is total discontinuity between the interpersonal and intergroup. Expressed in another way, this is a problem of generalisability. It is on this basis that both Hewstone and Brown (1986) and Troyna and Hatcher (1991) challenge the contact hypothesis. Troyna and Hatcher (1991) state that there is little empirical evidence to show that improved personal relationships necessarily lead to improved relationships between groups. Alarmingly, however, there is some evidence to suggest that negative experiences of individuals are more readily translated to affect attitudes towards the group than positive ones (Gudykunst, 1998; Brown, 1995).

Gudykunst (1998) seeks an explanation of why this might be so. He states that, in interaction the degree to which we activate social identities is dependent on the extent to which we perceive another as being a typical member of that social group. When a stranger's behaviours conform to our stereotypes then we attribute the behaviour to the group's disposition. When, on the other hand, behaviours do not conform to our expectations there is a tendency to personalise the attribution (Gudykunst, 1998; Council of Europe 2000i). This difficulty was one recognised by Allport (1954). Indeed he coined the term "re-fencing": 'When a fact cannot fit into a mental field, the exception is acknowledged, but the field is hastily fenced in again and not allowed to remain dangerously open' (p.53). Brown (1995) supports this with the finding that the more favourable a trait the more evidence required to confirm it and

the less evidence needed to disconfirm it. This resonates well with day-to-day experience – how often do we all bear witness to somebody attempting a compliment through expressing how unlike the others (of “their sort”) another is?

I explore below a theoretical attempt to overcome the disjunction between the interpersonal and the intergroup in effort to preserve the contact hypothesis as a useful tool. However, I move swiftly on to consider more fundamental matters. Given the above discussion of the categorisation process, it seems clear to me that it would be in no way advantageous if the contact hypothesis were to achieve its desired aims. This would, as I go on to describe, imply a system of categorisation based upon rigidly defined, homogeneous groups - one which perpetuates essentialism and thus prejudice.

Intergroup interaction

Efforts have been made to overcome the apparent shortcoming of the contact hypothesis – its failure to enable generalisations to be made from individuals to groups. For example, Hewstone and Brown (1986) attempt this by drawing a clear distinction between what they determine *interpersonal* and *intergroup* contact/behaviour. While intergroup interaction occurs in terms of group identification (social identity), interpersonal contact, they state, is determined by individual characteristics (personal identity). Crucially this bears no relation to numbers involved - 'Both interpersonal and intergroup behaviour are the action of individuals, but in one case they are the actions of individuals *qua* individuals, while in the other they are actions of individuals *qua* group

members.' (ibid., p.16). Gudykunst (1998) is supportive of this concept. He refers to three levels of identity: our human, social (professional, demographic, political etc) and personal (that which identifies us from members of our in-groups) identities, and claims we can communicate on any of these levels. Whichever dominates, he says, it is important to recognise that our personal and social identities influence all aspects of communication, as do the individual experiences of our lives.

Hewstone and Brown (1986) argue that this has significant implications for research and practice.

Unless the contact can be characterized as intergroup (i.e. between individuals as group representatives or *qua* groups members), any such positive outcomes will be primarily cosmetic, in the sense that they will leave divisive and conflictual intergroup relations unchanged. (p.16)

The logic of their argument is appealing. However, I remain unconvinced that framing all interaction in terms of groups is either possible or desirable as I explain in more detail below.

The flawed logic of the contact hypothesis

I will go on to describe why I believe the very aim of generalisation upon which the contact hypothesis is founded is undesirable. Before doing so I ask you to question the logic on which this was founded. Short (1993) explains why its proponents should never have anticipated success.

[...] there is no compelling reason to think that inter-racial contact, even under the most propitious circumstances, would ever achieve what was claimed on its behalf. If people who are prejudiced against a particular ethnic group find themselves, somewhat incongruously, enjoying the company of individual members of that group, it would be quite illogical

for them to conclude that the company of other (unknown) members of the group would be just as congenial (p. 163)

It clearly seems an unrealistically optimistic goal. However, as I have stated above, my greatest concern is with the essentialist foundations upon which the contact hypothesis is built. In particular, I am referring to its encouragement to lend salience to one aspect of an individual's identity over all others. Hewstone and Brown's (1986) proposed solution to the generalisability problem, I believe, serves only to reinforce this undesirable aspect of the contact hypothesis.

In order to communicate *qua group*, it is necessary to determine of which single group somebody is a representative, which aspect of identity should hold salience over and above all others. That is to say, to assign them to a single essentially defined category. It could be argued that this need not be so, that a more complex interpretation of identity is possible within this framework. If multiple aspects of identity are considered, the situation rapidly verges on the preposterous. For example, if you were to interact with me, should you really be supposed to assume that my behaviours should be translated to every group to which you perceive me to belong – all females, young people, omnivores, people wearing green trousers...? Immediately we come across problems to the logic of the idea that this might even be possible.

If one aspect of identity is to be singled out, then I am interested in how that choice should be made. More importantly, I question the very idea that we should attempt to reduce our complex, and often unconscious, processes of

categorisation to simplified conscious ones. It is the consciously enforced idea that one category of identity (and associated stereotypes) should over-ride all others that prejudice is founded on, as I argued above. Whether the prejudice be positive or negative, this is clearly not an educational approach.

[...]the generalisation of attitudes (i.e. the tendency to develop the same attitude towards an entire group as one holds towards an individual member of that group) is not an objective that educationalists should seek to attain. (Short, 1993, p.167)

This type of approach contradicts the wider aims of the contact hypothesis. It cannot be logical, nor desirable, to aim to break down barriers and overcome negative generalisations about groups, by means of asking individuals to generalise back to group level in terms of contact with individuals. Asking individuals to interact with others in terms of group identities makes those identities more salient and reinforces essentialist conceptualisations of difference.

I am, therefore, not able to agree with Hewstone and Brown (1986) when they state that 'Obviously, the failure to generalize positive attitudes to out group members is a critical weakness in traditional contact theory.' (p.18). In my view the critical weakness in the theory is the suggestion that generalising positive attitudes to outgroup members is desirable.

Cross-cultural exchange founded on the logic of the contact hypothesis has the potential to reinforce or generate an essentialised understanding of difference in the particular instance. Indeed it appears that the very foundations of the hypothesis are built upon such a conceptual framework.

Although contact theorists reject the negative evaluations of the racist right, their procedures frequently have in common the act of producing rather than simply measuring "race". That is to say that, in so far as it is assumed that people will be categorized in terms of "race", contact methodologies are insensitive to the way in which they render "race" salient and therefore elicit racist responses. (Reicher, 1986, p.155)

I argue, as Gilroy (2000) has done so in relation to antiracists, that proponents of the contact hypothesis are in danger of perpetuating the very thing they intend to overcome:

The contact paradigm seems to address the general problem of the articulation of received ideology and experience as the expression of "common sense" racism. Yet it disqualifies itself from the task in so far as it accepts and imposes the corner-stone of that common sense: racialization. It cannot solve the problem because it is part of the problem. (Reicher, 1986, p. 164)

I continue the discussion through practical illustration of the questionable working practices that can arise out of the contact hypothesis.

Reinforcing essentialism in practice

A European youth project in 1998 alerted me to some serious questions regarding the handling of stereotypes and the potential to reinforce essentialism through cross-cultural exchange. I was invited to join the organisers in planning a workshop session, to which I readily agreed. The confidence instilled in me upon the production of the Council of Europe's *Education Pack* was quickly dispelled when the nature of the proposed exercises became evident. *Euro-Rail "A la carte"* (Council of Europe, 2000f) was the first exercise proposed. It has the following (well intentioned) aims:

To challenge participants' stereotypes and prejudice about other people and minorities, and about the images and associations the text raises.

To reflect on the perceptions different participants have of minorities

To raise self-awareness about the limits of tolerance

To confront the different values and stereotypes of the participants

Each participant is given a list of 17 passengers, described in a short sentence (by way of illustration, the first three on the list are: '1. A Serbian soldier from Bosnia; 2. An overweight Swiss financial broker; 3. An Italian disc-jockey who seems to have plenty of dollars.'). On the basis of this information, working individually, the participants are then asked to choose from the list the three people with whom they would be most happy to share a couchette, and the three with whom they would be the least happy. A consensus decision is then aimed for in a small group discussion before concluding in a plenary. The notes I made at the time make my opinion of this clear:

I objected to this on several grounds: First, I think that the process and the method of the exercise should reflect its intentions -it can't be right to ask people to make judgements on very limited information when the objective is to stop people from being prejudiced and making judgements based on stereotypes. Also the situation is very false -who would really be interested or bothered to discuss it? As adults we are all quite aware that we hold stereotypes in our heads, I think in challenging them we can afford to talk quite consciously about those stereotypes that we hold. This kind of exercise also suggests stereotypes we might not otherwise have considered. It would seem much more open and effective to enable the people participating to reveal their own stereotypes rather than reacting to those others assume they might have.

(field notes, 9th July 1998)

There are two distinct objections¹⁰. First, the disjuncture between educational approach and aims, it both encourages judgements based on insufficient information and, in my opinion, is condescending (undemocratic). Further to this, the list of people itself is full of stereotypical associations. It is, for example, the young artist who is HIV positive, the Gypsy who is just out of prison, the French farmer who is carrying smelly cheese. I fail to see how such an exercise, even with the most well managed debriefing could hope to achieve its aims. Unfortunately this style of exercise (in which people are asked to employ shallow stereotypes to make judgements before discussing the wrongs of stereotyping) appears to be common. (For further examples see Council of Europe, 2000b; Council of Europe 2000c; Fennes and Hapgood, 1997). Such exercises are reminiscent in style of, now much derided, experiments dating as far back as the 1940's, such as those on which Aboud (1988) and Brown (1995) report in their studies of prejudice. It appears to me that the above exercises differ little from those early tests asking young children to choose *who looks nice?/who looks bad?/who would you like as a playmate?* from puppets or dolls with different coloured "skins". This alerted me to the fact that the process of evaluation, as well as that of teaching and learning, must be congruent with the aims of a project.

¹⁰ Before I am too damning of this material, I should acknowledge that the authors do ask for comment and criticism of it, and describe the work as in continual process of redefinition and production.

Reinforcing essentialism through evaluation

The focus of research on cross-cultural contact has been on attitude change, which has normally been assessed before and after an intervention (Connolly, 2000). This approach, its origins in the middle of the last century, was rapidly recognised as problematic. Allport (1954) commented on the ever-increasing complexities brought to light through attempts to apply such tests.

More to the point, the kind of questions employed to determine attitudes can be 'ethically dubious and putatively racist in that they can be seen to encourage respondents to distinguish between and generalise about the character-traits of different racial/ethnic groups' (Connolly, 2000, p.176). Clearly, it is counter-productive to attempt to teach people to be flexible and open in their interpretation of others, and then to assess their progress through attitudinal tests that reinforce notions of rigid, homogeneous groups.

Quite aside from moral or ethical constraints, it is evident that there are methodological flaws to attitudinal tests. Such tests, argues Connolly (2000), are limiting, not least for their failure to recognise the possible long-term outcomes of contact. Also they do not make any concessions to the effects of context, failing to take into account the effect of participants' home environment on their future attitudes and actions (Connolly, 2000; Duffy, 2000).

In addition, as I argued in Chapter 1, contemporary thought demands a transient and complex interpretation of identities.

A "postmodern" frame posits racist identities – like other identities, including that of "antiracist" - as decentred, fragmented by discourses

and by the pull of other identities. As such, racist identities are not necessarily consistent in their operation across different contexts and sites, or available in the form of transparent self-knowledge to the subjects. (Rattansi, 1999, p.92)

Prejudice is contingent, context specific and inconsistent (Connolly, 2000; Ignatieff, 1999). Rattansi (1999) cites various recent research studies that demonstrate the inconsistency in children's attitudes and the complexity of racist expression, including the now well-versed example of the "white girl" expressing strongly racist views before departing arms linked with her "Asian friend".

Challenging processes

Throughout the thesis I have been arguing that the significant educational outcome that should be strived towards is the capacity to make flexible and complex judgements and to adjust assumptions initially founded in stereotypes. Therefore attention to an individual's attitude towards particular groups is both misplaced and reinforces essentialism. The fact that it is difficult to assess how somebody's capacity to be open and unprejudiced in interacting with others cannot easily be measured is problematic. However the desire to demonstrate outcomes should not provide an excuse for the continuation of dubious educational or evaluative practices. The following quote demonstrates the potential for undesirable consequences to arise from processes founded in essentialism:

I attended a presentation by some young people from rural Powys who had participated in such an exchange. Most had never been to Cardiff let alone England or beyond: their minds were for the most part unsullied by nasty national stereotypes. Their experiences of an EC co-funded trip to three other countries ensured however that this was no

longer the case. The young people wrote and performed short “scenes from Europe” to reveal what they had learned on their visit before an increasingly uncomfortable audience of Commission officials. The scenes revealed that they not only knew that the French wore striped tee-shirts and ate frogs legs, the Germans wore lederhosen and slapped their thighs a lot and the Italians pinched bottoms. (Rees, 1998, p.4)

Developing good practice in cross-cultural exchange

The conclusions that the contact hypothesis is fundamentally flawed, and that cross-cultural exchange can have damaging consequences, do not imply that cross-cultural exchange itself is inherently worthless. However, I argue, this does imply that the manner in which cross-cultural exchange is conducted must be carefully considered.

It has long been recognised that cross-cultural contact does not always result in desirable outcomes. This concern, expressed by Singh (1995 and 1997) among others, has fuelled a struggle to determine how positive outcomes might be guaranteed. In the past, as I illustrate below, debate has tended to revolve around which conditions might ensure positive contact. However, I argue that while clearly not all conditions are conducive to positive contact, the notion that a set of conditions of positive contact can be determined demands critical discussion. There is a danger that guidance can thus be reduced to a list of criteria to fulfil, and boxes to tick. In such circumstances the quality of a project is reduced to its capacity to meet a set of targets, whose relevance may be questionable. Sets of conditions, I argue, have a tendency to be so specific as to relate only to the particular, or to be tautological in nature.

Having challenged the idea that good practice might benefit from such sets of conditions, I conclude the chapter by proposing an alternative approach to good practice, founded in non-essentialist understandings, and flexible and responsive practice.

Conditions of positive contact

Allport, in 1954, gave the following advice:

To be maximally effective, contact and acquaintance programs should lead to a sense of equality in social status, should occur in ordinary purposeful pursuits, avoid artificiality, and if possible enjoy the sanction of the community in which they occur. The deeper and more genuine the association, the greater its effect. (p.489).

It would be hard to dispute the sense in the spirit of his guidance. If people of equal status, living within a social structure that supports equality and democracy, are given a genuine reason to interact in a meaningful way, why suppose that contact could be anything other than beneficial? However, over the decades, lists of conditions have grown increasingly long. For, example, Gudykunst (1998) puts forward thirteen conditions to be met in order to ensure positive communication across cultures: The extensive list is one that he recognises is not exhaustive. There is now a tendency for conditions to relate so strongly to the particular that they are almost meaningless, as the following example illustrates:

competence among group members, a shared and understood goal; mutual respect and trust; the creation and manipulation of shared spaces; multiple forms of representation; continuous - but not continual - communication; formal and informal environments; clear lines of responsibility, but no restrictive boundaries; the acceptance that decisions do not have to be based on consensus, and that physical presence is not necessary; the selective use of outsiders; and the

realisation that the collaboration ends when its goal has been achieved. (Kaye, 1995, p.195).

As Pettigrew (1986) comments, such a restrictive set of conditions 'rapidly excludes the vast majority of intergroup situations in the world and renders the hypothesis trivial' (p. 180)¹¹.

I am equally concerned by the tendency for the conditions presented to take on a tautological nature. Reicher (1986) demonstrates how the conditions of successful contact have evolved over time to 'include equal status for the minority group member, intimacy, pleasant and rewarding interactions, the development of common goals and elite support for intergroup contact.' (p.153). On the other hand, he continues, involuntary or unpleasant contact 'where groups have cultural standards that are objectionable' (ibid.) will tend to have a counter effect and increase prejudice. Salvadori (1997) pushes this to its extreme in her identification of the participants' level of intercultural competence as a factor determining success. In other words, it seems that if people who are not too different from each other, and who can interact with each other well, are given an opportunity to do something mutually agreeable, they will get on well with each other and enjoy the experience. It's not so much that I fail to see the wisdom in Reicher's words – bringing together groups of disparate people involuntarily and without incentive, is not likely to have a positive outcome. However, particularly in the realm of cross-cultural

¹¹ It was on this basis that I abandoned my questionnaire study, as I explained in Chapter 2.

exchange, surely the task must be to find a means beyond uniting people who will anyway tend to get on well together.

An alternative approach

That the lists of conditions are shown to be restrictive and inward focusing suggests, in my view, that part of the definition of good practice is its dependence on the particular. That is to say, that which is good practice in one instance will not necessarily prove to be so in another. There is no formula.

I consider it to be of over-riding importance to recognise that there are many and varied ways of achieving a successful exchange. A project might be a great success while failing to meet the defined components of success. Equally to achieve a tick in many of the boxes is not to guarantee success. For example, the fact that a performance created with an international group is performed in all the languages spoken by members of that group might well be indicative of an inclusive working practice. In contrast, to prescribe use of all those languages as an essential aspect of inclusive practice is plainly ridiculous. That, however, is not to say that it does not matter how you approach and plan cross-cultural exchanges. Instead, it is to argue, as Pettigrew (1986) does, that practice should be driven by a broader theoretical basis, one that goes beyond a listing of conditions.

The theoretical basis that I propose, and that I go on to explore in relation to practice, seeks to bring about prejudice reduction through challenging, rather than reinforcing, essentialist conceptualisations of cultural difference. Such an

approach should make manifest the complexities and subtleties of cultural difference and of human interaction, and enable its participants to develop the skill to overcome rigid and shallow interpretations of stereotypes in their interaction with others. In the chapters that follow I explore how these ambitions for cross-cultural exchange might be achieved, both in the formal and nonformal educational sectors.

Chapter 5: Pushing at the limits – developing flexible boundaries through electronic communication

The debates and issues raised in this chapter are framed in an account of a cross-cultural Internet project, *Celebrate!*. Through this, perhaps unorthodox, style of presentation I hope to demonstrate that the theoretical points discussed are founded in and developed through practice. As a piece of action research the project is not presented as a model of good practice, but as an illustration of the possibilities and complexities of integrating theory and practice, and, indeed, of actually implementing an international project.

It will become apparent that *Celebrate!* is not dissimilar in its aims and intentions to many a project operating under the umbrella of multicultural education. I ask the reader to bear in mind that the project was not launched as a beacon of innovation, but as a means of developing existing school partnerships, fostering new ones, and overcoming the limitations of available educational resources. The last is to me the most interesting point, for it is here that I will go on to argue that *Celebrate!* stands apart from many projects with similar aims. The focus on personal as opposed to collective narrative, I argue, can play a significant role in dismantling essentialist conceptualisations of difference.

I begin by setting the context for *Celebrate!* and providing a brief description of the project. Following this, I revisit some significant ethical and methodological issues raised in Chapter 2 regarding the data on which the chapter draws. The main emphasis of the chapter is, however, on extending

Chapter 4's discussion of contact and communication through the exploration of electronic cross-cultural exchange. I begin by considering the potential of this medium to enhance education in general terms before focusing on *Celebrate!*.

Initiatives involving Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are, it seems, commonly seen as providing stimulus high quality learning. Further than this, the abundance of optimistic descriptions could lead one to view electronic cross-cultural communication as a panacea for prejudice. It is easy, I am not the first to suggest, to conjure rose-tinted pictures of a truly global community founded in electronic communication. As ever, the reality is more complex.

Of particular interest to the thesis is the fact that electronic communication is heralded as medium free from the categorical constraints and embedded prejudices of the "real" world. As such, it can be presented as the ideal means of overcoming the essentialist categorisations so deeply engrained in the physical world. Such speculation, however, does not correlate with recent research evidence or with practical reality. The need to categorise, as discussed in Chapter 4, appears just as strong in the realm of electronic communication which, for the time being, appears grounded in the categorical frameworks of the physical world. This is not to diminish the potential of electronic communication to alter the basis of human communication so fundamentally as to challenge our very personal and social existence. However, given that this does not appear to be the case currently, the

extension of such a debate falls beyond the scope of the thesis. Instead, returning to *Celebrate!*, my main concern is to explore the potential within electronic communication to carve a way between essentialist categorisation and such social breakdown.

In addition to exploring the working processes of the project, and paying particular attention to the use of personal narrative as a means of overcoming essentialism, the chapter also makes room for a discussion of the more practical constraints upon the implementation of such projects. I conclude by exploring the potential for school-based initiatives such as *Celebrate!*; in particular I discuss how they might be implemented in accordance with the National Curriculum for England and Wales. But, the first task, to which I now turn, is to introduce *Celebrate!*.

Celebrate!

In brief, *Celebrate!* is a global Internet project for all young people aged 7-18, whatever their values or beliefs, and wherever they come from. The website provides a forum for the sharing of individuals' first-hand experiences and opinions of festivals, special occasions and celebrations; religious or non-religious, local or international. This is the project about which the following discussions revolve.

Background

The *Celebrate!* project was created and developed by a Religious Education (RE) teacher and myself following a year's collaboration on other initiatives.

This collaboration was not the product of scientific selection, but a deliberate attempt to establish a partnership with a teacher who would be sympathetic to my educational interests. The individual concerned is a well-established senior teacher at a multicultural, co-educational middle school serving just over 400 pupils. He has a long history of developing multicultural and multifaith teaching, and a commitment to social inclusion. The quality of his work is widely acknowledged, not least by inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED) who, in their latest report on the school, made particular reference to the outstanding teaching in RE. We worked together for a year, with the entire 9-13 age-range of the school, with a focus on developing links with schools in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH)¹².

In 1998, in order to further develop these inter-school connections, we attempted to meet our shared ambitious educational and personal goals, through the integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), RE, and cross-cultural exchange. *Celebrate!* thus originated as an educational rather than a research initiative. This project was founded on the following optimistic aims, as recorded in a later formal project proposal:

to develop active citizenship through the promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance between young people from a diversity of religious, linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds

to improve participants' communication by enhancing literacy, information technology and co-operative communication skills

¹² The collaboration began in connection with the school-linking project described in Chapter 1.

to facilitate intercultural dialogue and the understanding of difference to help combat xenophobia and prejudice

to enable young people to reflect upon their own lives and experiences in relation to those of others, and to be critical and reflective in their thinking

to enable the meaningful exchange of information across cultural borders through the sharing of personal experiences

to create innovative teaching material and develop pedagogical strategies to enhance both the intercultural dimension of school curricula and the learning environment

(Project proposal, February, 1999)

It was our ambition, by the year 2000, to have established a sustainable network, comprising a core group of participating schools from across the six continents. Participants (aged 7-18yrs) would have a wide diversity of life experiences and beliefs both religious and non-religious. A particular emphasis was placed on including those who did not have easy access to the Internet or to such projects.

As my introduction states, we aimed to achieve this through a website based project. The opportunity was provided for contributors to introduce themselves in a dedicated space on the site, though the main focus was a calendar of events – any celebration or special occasion, religious or non-religious, local, or international – linking to participants' personal experiences and opinions of these events. This was intended as the foundation for links that would progress beyond the website to include video-conferencing, pen pal or "key pal" links, and face-to-face exchange. The website was set up to include its own interactive element in the guise of a questions and answers board, upon

which any individual, both participants and visitors to the site, could raise or respond to a question.

Methodological issues

As I already stated, I am making use of the *Celebrate!* project as an illustrative and developmental tool, rather than as a source of generalisable evidence. Through working on and developing this project I was provided with something concrete to which I could relate the theoretical propositions outlined in the above chapters. *Celebrate!* was one of several projects with which I was involved and was not specifically designed as a case study project. Rather, through the course of its development over an almost two year period, I became aware of the degree to which it both influenced and was influenced by my conceptual understandings. As an illustrative tool I find it invaluable, both for the instances where it brought changes to my perceptions and, in further areas where it provides a clear means of expressing what might otherwise appear a very abstract concept. In short *Celebrate!* is used to root my discussion in the world of practice. The reader of what follows should bear in mind that the evidence I use is not presented to provide proofs, but to raise or illustrate issues. On a further cautionary note, the project is still running (and continuing to mutate) and no systematic evaluation has yet been undertaken, hence the speculative undertones.

Ethics

I am aware that I have not respected research conventions as regards the amount of information provided about those involved in the project, having

given only very limited detail of the main school in which the project was developed. This is in the interests of preserving anonymity (see the discussion in Chapter 2 on confidentiality and consent). My intention has been to provide sufficient information to preserve a sense of reality and groundedness without revealing enough to make the schools and individuals involved traceable. Inevitably this has resulted in only very general details being provided in the report that follows. This has in some respects been problematic, as the focus of the project has been on providing quite specific information in order that more complex and fluid understandings of difference might be presented.

Equally problematic is the fact that despite the above precautions, there is still significant potential for identifying the project, and thus the schools and individuals involved. This is particularly so as *Celebrate!* is a high profile project in the public domain, and one which the school has actively sought to publicise. Further to my concern, despite my best intentions to be open, I cannot deny (as was discussed in Chapter 2) that there will be those involved in the project who remain unaware of its relationship to my research. I have had, therefore to consider carefully both what material I use and the manner in which it is presented.

I justify using the material that I have on the following grounds. Most significantly, the majority of the material used is extracted from submissions to the website and, thus, was prepared to be placed in the public domain. Where this is not the case, I feel confident that the material is sufficiently disguised that individuals cannot be traced. I have eliminated names, both of people and

of places throughout, and have used a pseudonym for the project title. Furthermore, none of the material included is perceived to be of a particularly sensitive or private nature, nor could it be seen to present an individual in a negative manner. As a final precaution, a draft of this chapter was discussed with the teacher with whom I developed the project, and given approval.

Where I have reproduced the work of the children involved, in order to preserve authenticity I have been as true to the original texts as possible. The quotes are altered only through identifying details such as names being removed and replaced inside square brackets with the type of information e.g. [name]. Otherwise the exact text complete with any typographical or other errors has been reproduced.

I now go on to address the issues under discussion. I begin by exploring the perceived educational benefits of electronic communication.

An electronic panacea?

One could be forgiven, in the present climate, for believing that if only we could get enough computers into our schools then all educational problems would be resolved. Perhaps such a suggestion is a little facetious, but it is certainly true that computers, and the Internet in particular, are given ardent praise for the gains they bring to almost any aspect of education. For example, Kaye (1995) demonstrates the extent to which collaborative learning methods have benefited from the increased use of computers in the classroom. Computers, it is implied, make this contribution through their support of peer tutoring and active participation, as well as for the increased

motivation they bring to a learning situation. Enthusiasm grows further with the mention of electronic communication. The Internet and electronic communication can be perceived as providing a revolutionary opportunity for active participation, and a means of opening the doors of the classroom to the world (Odyssey World Trek for Service and Education, 1998; Rogers et al, 1998). As I demonstrate below, electronic communication is associated with equity and diversity in the most fervent terms.

I then go on to discuss how, beyond the enthusiasm for the unconstrained and egalitarian interaction it is perceived to offer, electronic communication can be presented as a means of transcending the essentialist categorisations with which the physical world is imbued. It is here that I relate electronic communication to the conclusions drawn in the last chapter regarding categorisation and communication. I conclude by demonstrating that, once evidence rather than speculation is considered, electronic (like face-to-face) communication depends upon categorisation. Thus, I argue, there is equally a need, within this medium, to work towards overcoming essentialist conceptualisations.

Building a global community

[...] we believe that the Internet is an ideal medium for teaching and learning in RE. The Internet provides an unprecedented opportunity to learn about other people and their ideas, values and beliefs from interaction with real people throughout the world.

(*Celebrate!* project report, April 1999)

The establishment of *Celebrate!*, as the above extract from the project report illuminates, was indicative of our sharing the widespread confidence in the capacity of the electronic media to promote global communication and understanding.

Many educationalists are enthusiastic about the potential held by computer-based interactions to provide significant positive contact between students in different countries:

The Internet offers one of the most exciting and effective ways to teach students how to both communicate and collaborate by connecting teams of students with other classrooms around the world. (Andres, 1995, p.1)

Rogers (1994) sees the value of modern technology in making the so-called “global society” a tangible reality for all. He claims that when people interact with others from around the world, the resultant understanding and respect developed for differences – be they cultural, linguistic, political, environmental or geographic – alters not only their view of the world, but of their place in it.

Electronic communication is said to contribute to the building of such a global society. It is proposed first that it increases the opportunity for communication, and secondly that it provides a particular quality of communication. On the first point, Email contact ‘opens up all kinds of audiences to the child, giving them rich stimulus for writing and broadening their concept of the world beyond school and the people in it.’ (McFarlane, 1997, p.170). In relation to the second, the Internet or Email communication, is claimed to have the potential for overcoming social constraints common in face-to-face communication. Reid (1999), for example, reports upon research that has

shown people to behave more freely and with greater spontaneity than in face-to-face interactions. The freeing of social constraints can be linked to the physical attributes of the communications medium, in particular the relationship it has with time – the potential it offers for the integration of real-time and deferred-time interactions (Kaye, 1995). This, continues Kaye, provides a rich environment for the discussion of difference on account of the opportunities for storing, retrieving and reflecting upon past communications.

Additionally, it is claimed that electronic communication provides a forum in which people from a wide variety of backgrounds can be given an equal status when participating alongside others, thus enhancing learning in a manner that would not be easy in a conventional classroom setting.

By establishing open lines of communication in a neutral forum (i.e. E-mail), it is hoped that discussion will replace stereotypes and common interests will replace surface differences. If children communicate with youth from other places, they can transcend their ethnic, religious, gender-related or socio-economic differences and begin the process of healing. (IEARN, 1998)

It is proposed that Email provides the grounds for interaction that is meaningful, personal and immediate while allowing a distance that can dissipate feelings of threat or inequality (see also Calvert, 1996).

It has recently become common for school exchanges to be based upon long-term partnerships, with learning spanning a wide age-range and many subject areas through the exchange of messages, surveys and project work, letters, and other work (Council of Europe 2000e). It appears that in this way, technology could greatly enhance the capacity of formal (as well as nonformal) education to generate a broad-based global dimension.

Transcending essentialism in electronic communication

The above comments suggest that electronic communication is qualitatively different from other forms of communication. That is to say, it is not only different in terms of the increased efficiency or speed of communication, but that the very structure and conditions of communication are fundamentally altered. The degree to which this might be so is of vital importance to human interaction, particularly if electronic communication is perceived to have the capacity to transcend the physical world. Most pertinent to the continued discussion of categorisation and communication, are the consequences arising from the transcendence of those societal divisions perceived to be rooted in the physical world. That is to say, the faith that electronic communication provides an egalitarian frame in which interactions are neutralised by the lack of physical characteristics that might in the physical world form the basis of prejudices. This apparent miracle cure to long-standing social divisions has been accorded much optimistic attention. Many claims are made over the capacity of electronic communication to surmount traditional societal divisions.

Current research, science fiction and wishful thinking suggest that Cyberspace will be a realm in which physical markers such as sex, race, age, body type and size will eventually lose all salience as the basis for the evaluative categorization of self/other. (O'Brien, 1999, p.78)

It would appear that through freeing us from the need to categorise, electronic communication almost by default overcomes the problems associated with essentialism that have formed so much of the discussion in previous chapters. Electronic communication, in this view, has an inbuilt egalitarianism, as

expressed by Poster in his study of *Modes of Communication* as early as 1992.

Factors such as institutional status, personal charisma, rhetorical skills, gender and race - all of which may deeply influence the way an utterance is received - have little effect in computer conferences (pp. 122/3)

Kollock and Smith (1999) state that such a view is founded in the perceived ambiguity resulting from physical appearance being obscured. Consequently, it is concluded that individuals will be judged for what they say rather than who they are.

Such optimism is evident at practical and pedagogic levels as well as in social theory. Simpson and McEneel (1997) in their book *Internet for Schools*, subscribe to this notion, and talk of the Internet's capacity 'to eliminate racial, age, sexual and ethnic barriers to communication' (p.54). They continue:

Correspondents see only one's words, not the colour of one's skin or the accent of the voice or the handicapping condition of the body. The Internet is a great equalizer. (ibid.)

Presented in this light, electronic communication really does seem to hold the key to a prejudice-free global society. The appeal of such a notion is great, and the immediate logic is as clear as the foundation of the contact hypothesis. However, not least due to the vital importance of categorisation to communication, as explored in Chapter 4, contemporary commentators have been led to question what effects this qualitatively different mode of communication might have on both the communication process itself, and on personal and social identification of the participants.

Subjectivity and categorisation

Donath (1999) writes that the understanding of others' identities (and therefore our capacity to interact), is disturbed in the disembodied world of electronic communication, where the majority of identity cues to which we are accustomed are absent. The implication is that, if electronic communication transcends the social categorisation framework of the physical world, relations between self and other, idea and action, language and society cannot but be fundamentally affected. It is this level of change that Poster (1992 and 2000) relates to a changing *mode* of communication. Significantly, the mode of communication is not anchored within a particular medium (e.g. face-to-face, or electronic), but is both a producer and product of the medium. So, while electronic communication may be a major contributor to the development of an information mode, it is possible for that communication to take place within the mode more commonly associated with face-to-face interaction. Likewise the mode of electronic information affects all forms of communication and the general nature of subjectivity itself. It is in this connection that more extreme theorists are now suggesting that the self need no longer be constrained by the boundary of the body (see for example Gilroy, 2000).

One could question whether, with the dismantling of the rational self, any kind of communication, or indeed ordered existence, would be possible. I raise this issue, though, as a means of demonstrating that if rationally grounded communication is thought to be worth preserving, electronic communication generates new complexities to be addressed, and also reinforces the more

traditional notion that categorisation is vital to this process. My main justification for moving on from this fundamental challenge, is practical evidence. The abundance of electronic communication and its apparent capacity to support meaningful interaction, led me to consider the practice of categorisation in electronic communication. As I now go on to demonstrate, rather than providing a new medium in which physically founded categorisations automatically diminish in significance generating true egalitarianism, it appears that effective electronic communication, like that in any medium, depends upon successful categorisation.

Back to reality: Categorisation in electronic communication

It appears that, so far as our everyday reality is concerned, electronic communication has done little to alter our conceptualisation process. Indeed, some would question the extent to which electronic communication has brought any of the changes anticipated. Despite the Utopian vision of universal acquaintance and limitless freedom, electronic communication has been subject to long-standing critique. For example, Balle (1991) is sceptical of the capacity of electronic communication to achieve miracles where traditional communication has failed, and fears that in equal proportion to liberating communication, it instils an obsession with useless information and abortive communications.

As time passes, comment on electronic communication is founded increasingly on research rather than speculation, and opinions are continually revised. Kollock and Smith (1999) go on to acknowledge an increasingly

widespread belief that online interaction reproduces traditional social hierarchies and divisions. More recently, Poster also comments that,

participants code “virtual” reality through categories of “normal” reality. They do so by communicating to each other as if they were in a physical common space, as if this space were inhabited by bodies, were mappable by Cartesian perspective (2000).

This continued reliance on the categories of “normal” reality is widely remarked upon currently. O'Brien claims from her research into gender identities in Cyberspace that, 'despite the hype of Cyberspace as "unmarked" territory, we are nonetheless mapping this frontier with the same social categories of distinction that we have used to chart modern reality' (p.88).

Practical experience demonstrates the dependence on information that grounds interaction in physical reality is not purely a theoretical one. As new links were forged in the *Celebrate!* project, it became clear that there is a very definite need for individuals to know with whom they are interacting as well as to make their own identity clear. However, in accordance with the experiences I described in Chapter 1, the emphasis was on the personal. Even the briefest of requests to join the project was packed with information, identifying the person/people who were prospective participants. The following example is illustrative.

Dear Alison

My name is [name], from [town], [country]. I facilitate a group of twenty five students, who are interested in communicating and sharing ideas with other students (14-18yrs)

Please register us for the Celebrate! project.

kind regards!

(Email correspondence, 12th May 1999)

Even where a teacher felt it was not really the place to talk about herself, the need to feel known appeared compelling enough to override this:

And now something about myself: my name is [name], I'm [age] years old, married, I have a 11 year old son and I've been an EFL teacher at a state high school for about 20 years (so long ??!! I can hardly believe I'm talking about myself!!)

(Email correspondence, 9th July 1999)

The fact that the above quotes seem unremarkable, I feel is itself evidence of the degree to which it is taken for granted that one should want to know such information about another person, or share such information about oneself. I was continually reminded of this need to share personal information as worked progressed on the *Celebrate!* projects. If Emails arrived to children without accompanying personal details such as the name and age of the author, these details were more often than not requested in response. Even where the topic of an Email was about particular festivals, room was often made for sharing personal details such as hobbies. There were even instances where contributions to the festivals section of the website began with a personal introduction.

Further to this, it is argued that the symbolic cues on which we base interactions are firmly rooted in face-to-face communication (O'Brien, 1999). 'Whether someone is present or not, we conjure up and make sense of ourselves and others in terms of embodiment.' (ibid., p.79). It appears that our

conceptual processes are so rooted that we cannot imagine alternative categorisations.

That human beings have bodies is among the most obvious thing about us, as are the extensive communicative and non-utilitarian uses to which we put them. The human body is simultaneously a referent of individual continuity, an index of collective similarity and differentiation, and a canvas upon which identification can play. Social identification in isolation from embodiment is unimaginable. (Jenkins, 1996, p.21)

Paradoxically, it seems there is a danger that the lack of physical cues, rather than diminishing the salience of physical categorisation, could lead to an over-reliance on very limited information yet still within the same framework. By this I mean that in making our judgements (crucial to communication) we are forced to rely on very crude “facts” about a person (their, age, gender, nationality, religion). This is in contrast to the information that is processed in face-to-face encounter, which, as I argued in Chapter 4, is much more refined and multidimensional. There is a danger that electronic communication, far from transcending the categories of the physical world, could reinforce them in a very crude manner.

The use of video conferencing, in which it can be assumed that physical cues are present, adds new complexity to this problematic.

The inter-personal dynamics of technology-mediated educational interactions are dramatically different from conventional classroom situations. A range of problems arise (sic) out of these new dynamics, including the loss of eye contact, the invisibility of body language, misreading of facial expressions and the absence of peripheral gestures. Inter-communication delays or “phase lag” can cause confusion and breakdown in communication unless a high bandwidth is available. (European Schoolnet, 1999)

On a more encouraging note, however, it does appear that, where traditional, physical markers are not so readily apparent, further grounds of categorisation are sought.

Identity cues are sparse in the virtual world, but not non-existent. People become attuned to the nuances of email addresses and signature styles. New phrases evolve that mark their users as members of a chosen subculture. (Donath, 1999, p. 30)

The need to categorise people, or put them in a social place, is paralleled by a need to locate people physically in interactions that are not face-to-face. As I began to speculate on this notion, I discovered instances in everyday life that reinforced it. I am thinking for example of the now clichéd announcement of a mobile telephone user – “I’m on the train”. Within this framework of thinking, such behaviour, parodied for its irritant factor, becomes much more explicable.

The above discussion shows that there is a continued reliance upon categorisation frameworks that are either grounded in face-to-face interaction, or constructed in a similar manner. This is not altogether surprising given that electronic communication forms only a small part of our social interaction.

The net is only one of many ways in which the same people may interact. It is not a separate reality. People bring to their online interactions such baggage as their gender, stage in the life cycle, cultural milieu, socio-economic status, and offline connections with others. (Wellman and Gulia, 1999, p.170)

The Centre for International University Cooperation (Centre for International University Cooperation, 1998) further supports this in the results of a wide-ranging questionnaire survey on the use of ICT in Comenius (European school education) projects. It demonstrates that electronic communication, in

those projects, remains secondary. Both fax and telephone were used more widely than Email (the most widely used ICT resource), and conventional mail as commonly. This is reflected in the fact that 76% of respondents stated that ICT was used as an additional resource rather than as the central theme of the project.

According to Poster's (1992) definition, we are, whichever medium of communication used, operating in a mode of communication whose symbolic cues are grounded in face-to-face interaction. By which ever means it is done, the need to draw distinctions between people is evident. It is only when interactions become defined in term of electronic communication that we enter into Poster's (1992 and 2000) "mode of electronic communication". This defines the point at which the rational self and communication as we know it would become threatened. What remains to be sought is evidence of whether society will ever enter this "electronic mode" or whether the ties of rational categorisation shall remain dominant. Clearly, though, such a consideration is beyond the scope of the present research.

Given the apparent firm need for people to have a sense of groundedness and to work within rationally defined categories, it can only be concluded that presently, whatever medium we communicate through, our requirements are rooted in a mode of face-to-face interaction. There is a need to straddle the two modes, maintaining the rootedness and security of the face-to-face while overcoming its rigidity and its tendency towards essentialist, prejudice inducing, categorisation. In my view, then, the challenge for educators (in

whatever medium they are operating) remains to overcome the reliance on rigid categorisations rooted in shallow one-dimensional stereotypes (positive or negative), while simultaneously constructing a bridge over the abyss of indistinction and the associated dismantling of society.

I have no wish to undermine the enthusiasm that has been shown for electronic communication and its potential as a tool for challenging prejudice and equality. However, electronic communication per se clearly is not, and cannot be, a panacea for prejudice. It must be made clear that electronic communication is nothing more than a tool that has to be employed in an intelligent and sensitive manner. In education, it is vital that enthusiasm for modern technology does not override a long tradition of thoughtful teaching practice.

At a time when central government and commercial pressures to increase computer use in schools are effectively in tandem, it is of the utmost importance to ensure that IT remains the servant of education rather than a hijacker of the enterprise. (Bonnett, 1997, p.159)

I now go on to illustrate how we used this tool in the *Celebrate!* project to develop the participants' capacity to operate with more complex and less rigid (non-essentialist) interpretations of cultural difference.

Celebrate! – finding a way between

A key element of the *Celebrate!* project that I feel plays a particularly important part in enabling its participants to challenge rigid or essentialist understandings of cultural difference, is the emphasis on contextualised personal experience. A significant ambition of the *Celebrate!* project was to

overcome what we, as organisers of the project, felt were the limitations of conventional teaching materials (see Chapter 3). In particular, although resources about different cultural and religious traditions are plentiful, there appears to be a general shortage of information about individuals' experiences. Consequently, much conventional teaching material provides a very restricted basis on which to teach about differences *within* as well as *between* national, cultural or religious groups. Such material, therefore, can do little to assist in challenging simplistic or essentialist perceptions of others.

The aim of the discussion below is to demonstrate how *Celebrate!* was developed and implemented in an effort to provide both an inclusive, anti-essentialist learning process and information resource.

Inclusive practice

A central purpose of *Celebrate!* was to enable individuals to share their personal experiences and opinions, and to encourage as many young people as possible to do so. For this reason, in the main partner school we decided to launch the project with a focus on Christmas in an attempt to generate whole school involvement. As the project report states:

All were encouraged to write about their experiences of Christmas Day itself, this included practising Christians, secular nominal Christians, and members of other faith communities. We recognised that this would also provide an opportunity for Jehovah's Witnesses, who are normally excluded from taking part in any school based topic on Christmas, to write about and explain to other pupils their reasons for not celebrating Christmas. We included the work of as many people as possible on the web pages.

(*Celebrate!* project report April 1999)

The fact that Christmas and Ramadan coincided in 1998, provided a good basis for discussion and broadened the scope for comparison as we prepared the first material to go on the website. We developed this material with a conscious effort to generate dialogue between the young people involved and to encourage reflection upon both their own ideas and experiences and those of others. Byram (1997) expresses well the importance of this:

When learners understand, even if only partially, the perspective of other people, and simultaneously acquire a reflective perspective on themselves, their means of communication and interaction with others are profoundly affected. (p. 8)

The *Celebrate!* project report mentioned above outlines how we attempted this in practice:

As a way of introducing the project discussions were held in RE lessons about the general nature of festival and celebration. We also discussed the cultural and individual differences in the ways in which the same festival or celebration can take place even within one faith group. We then moved from the general to the particular and focused on Christmas and Ramadan, which in 1998 coincided. Children exchanged views and experiences orally, first in pairs then in small groups and finally as a class. They then prepared individual written work on their own experiences and opinions of either festival.

(*Celebrate!* project report, April 1999)

From the early stages of the project we were keen to promote the appreciation of complex understandings of differences and to provide opportunities for discussion around this issue.

Personal narratives

Through such a working practice, the writing that was produced, as intended, generally reflected the authors' "raw" experiences, rather than the shared

narratives through which we are routinely encouraged to reinvent our lives. To make this point more clear, what I am suggesting is that this distinction is between people's actual practices (often given limited attention), and the commonly occurring invented narratives of, for example "what the English do at Christmas" or "how Muslims celebrate Eid". These stories of what "we" or "they" do are all too readily absorbed along with the embedded notion that religious, national or cultural homogeneity is a reality.

The examples below illustrate the diversity which exists within populations commonly classified as uniform wholes. There is not room, however, to demonstrate here the real strength of the material posted on the website, namely the vast array of unique accounts which together generate a very broad, detailed and informative picture. Insight is given into much more than the "facts" about how individuals celebrate particular occasions, the accounts providing a wealth of social and cultural information about lifestyle and values.

Prior to presenting extracts from the website it is worth noting that on the *Celebrate!* site each contribution is headed by the first name, age and school of the author. For reasons of confidentiality (as described above) this information has been omitted here. Likewise, place names have been removed. Where I have felt it is relevant (either to the discussion, or to give a sense of groundedness to the reader) I have provided information on such things as whether the accounts came from children in the same school.

The first two examples are of accounts of Ramadan. Both were written by girls in the same British school.

At Ramadan I had to pray and think about religious things. At morning, dinner time, after noon and about 4.00 I had to pray after Iftar. At 2pm I helped my sister to cook only if I waited to help. At night about 2am my mum got up to cook. Then we got up to eat. You have to eat before six if you don't then your fast wouldn't work. We have to read 5 times a day but when it's Ramadan we have to read 20 rakath. I think Ramadan is really exciting because you get used to doing Religious things. When it's Ramadan I am so excited because after Ramadan finishes it is Eid. At Eid we eat some nice things and we go around people's houses saying a special word which is Eid Mubbarak. We get lots of money to spend at Eid and we go to the [place name], Bowling Alley.

(Celebrate! website)

Early in the morning my mum came into my room and woke me up at about 5 o'clock in the morning, and led me to the dining room. She went into the kitchen. She gave me a bowl of Cornflakes and a cup of milk, she came in the dining room and said, "you are not allowed to eat or drink after 6 o'clock". Ramadan is a period of fasting, you do it for a month, and then you start giving money to the charity, after the month of fasting. It is quite hard to fast for 30 day's, if you are ill you don't have to fast. Even if you are 18,16, 17, 19, 20 and over and you are ill you still don't have to fast. It is a very nice month.

(Celebrate! website)

The next three accounts give the quite contrasting experiences of New Year recounted by three children attending the same school.

On new Years Eve we didn't know what to do, I wanted to stay at home because I wanted to play on my new computer. But I had to go, because my sisters wanted to go out, but my Mum didn't want to leave me alone in the house. At 10:00 p.m. we got in the car, and set off to the Quayside. On the way there, I sat in the front of the car. We stopped at the traffic lights, there was about 4 drunken men walking to our car, they started banging on our side window of the car. We parked the car and went to the Quayside. There was a

big party with lots of people there. We were waiting for the fireworks to start. Then it was 1999! All I could hear was the sound of bottles smashing. I went back to our house at 1:30 Am. At home I was playing on my computer till 3:00 Am.

(Celebrate! website)

On new years eve morning I got up and then it was a normal day till 9.00 clock when we went into the town and saw and joined in the celebration. We watched all the floats and fireworks by the sea by the time it was over we had to walk home. When we finally got home it was 4.00 clock in the morning and I fell asleep face down on the floor. When I woke up I couldn't lift my head up there.

(Celebrate! website)

On New Years Eve I had three glasses of martinie and watched T.V. until 9:00pm, then I went to bed but five minutes later my neighbour came in drunk and shouting at her cat. Things like "I'm sick of you Tammy" and swearing and shouting, "I'm going to kill boys and girls at Tesco". So in shock I ran down stairs, I told my Mum, that Cath is shouting and screaming. So my Mum said "you can stay down hear until 12:00pm. So I waited 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4,3, 2, 1, at that point I got my dogs front paws and started dancing around the room, and I was screaming and shouting "Happy New Year!" and my Mum said "up to bed". So I went to bed and the next thing I knew Cath knocked on the door and asked do you want some Christmas cake?.

(Celebrate! website)

Embedded in such narrative accounts is a volume of cultural and social information that would be hard to reproduce if done so consciously. Consider for example the second extract on Ramadan, which is packed with information not only about Ramadan itself. In terms of lifestyle and the culture of daily practice we learn about such everyday things as the structure of a house and the sleeping arrangements within it, what time is considered to be unusually

early, and eating habits. In asking for personal experiences of a particular occasion a wealth of information is revealed about values, habits, beliefs, family, housing, lifestyle, as well as the taste, smell and emotion associated with the event.

Personal versus collective narratives

A generous invitation for collaboration from another, much more established, international Internet project about festivals and celebrations forced me to remember the founding motivations of *Celebrate!*, and to recognise a significant difference between it and other projects. The first notable difference was in the layout of the site itself. Where the *Celebrate!* site categorises material according to the event, this other site was organised country by country, thus making comparisons of the same event more difficult. More importantly, in my opinion, though was the style in which each event was presented.

Consider for example the following extract on English Christmas, which is an example of what I have been calling collective narratives.

In England Christmas is a particularly special time, the preparations begin several weeks in advance as both the traditional Christmas Cake and Christmas pudding need to be made at least a month before to allow their flavours to develop. Christmas carol services are held in Churches and schools in the weeks leading up to Christmas and often children act on the nativity weeks or hold a Christmas concert. Homes are decorated with garlands, a Christmas tree, and often holly wreaths. Children may also place stockings above the fireplace in the hope that Santa Claus will leave them a present on Christmas morning. Often children leave

out a mince pie and a carrot (for rudolph the reindeer) on Christmas eve to thanks Santa to their presents. On Christmas day presents are opened usually before breakfast as children are too excited to wait, Christmas lunch consists of turkey, vegetables stuffing, sausages wrapped in bacon which is followed by the Christmas pudding coated in brandy butter. Often family parties are held and it generally a time for happiness and enjoyment.

(Extract from <http://wfs.eun.org/schools/timeline/festivals/index.htm>)

This presents a sharp contrast to contributions (from the same country) about Christmas, posted on the Celebrate! site. While elements of the collective narrative are present in the personal accounts – meaning that it is possible to draw some generalisations – the greater complexity (and level of interest) attached to particular realities is preserved.

On Christmas day I got up at 4.00am and opened my stocking. After I opened my stocking I asked my Mam and Dad if they would get up. But they said "No." So I went back to bed but I couldn't get to sleep so I just read for a while. I got up again at 5.10am and asked my Mam if she would get up now she said yes. I got lots of presents the best ones were ~ Bust-a-Groove (a Playstation Game), a Bike, an England Tracksuit, and Resident Evil. I think Christmas is great all the presents you get and it is Christ's Birthday .You know, I just can't help it but I never seem to remember it's Christ's birthday on the day of Christmas . Anyway Christmas is the "Best" time throughout the year. I think Christmas is great, and you get a few weeks off school.

(Celebrate! website)

I enjoy Christmas very much even the preparation. Like wrapping the presents and writing cards. On Christmas Eve my relatives come who live in far away places like London and Norwich. Also on Christmas Eve my Dad gives me some Disarano Amareto. He says it will make me go to sleep. On Christmas morning my whole family opens their stockings in my mum and dad's room taking it in turns

to open a present from inside of our stocking. In the daytime we have a huge vegetarian lunch, that my whole family had helped make the day before.

The one thing I really don't like about Christmas is the fact that millions of turkeys and pigs get killed just for people to eat, I am a vegetarian and when I think of millions of people eating something that lived makes me feel sick. I also think that everyone should enjoy Christmas no matter who they are. But this doesn't happen. A lot of people spend Christmas alone, or unhappy. This year I made 2 children's Christmases a lot more enjoyable by sending 2 boxes off for Christmas child. I did this because Christmas is a time for giving not just taking.

(Celebrate! website)

Once again, I flag the contrast between the two styles of presentation. Not only are the personal accounts much more vivid, but they are packed with much more information – we are given insights into the mobile nature of society, the division of labour, social and other values, and much more.

However, it seems that we are so used to reiterating our collective narratives that our personal experiences take on diminished significance. It was surprisingly difficult to obtain personal accounts, by which I mean those written in the first person about actual experiences or expressing individual opinions. Frequently, despite clear instructions that contributions should reflect personal experiences and opinions, we were often provided with stories of “what we do”. Although we were grateful for any contributions to the site, where possible we avoided accepting such accounts. The following description of Christmas did not make it onto the site:

At Xmas, we often decorate a Xmas tree, usually a plastic fir tree. Under the tree, there is a "Presepe", a crib representing the Sacred Family and the Nativity (the Child). Then, we exchange presents and we have a big lunch with all the family and the relatives. We eat tortellini, lasagne, tagliolini, roast-lamb, roast turkey, cotechino with roast potatoes, cakes (panettone, pandoro) and we drink champagne.

(Email correspondence, 13 April 1999)

While, I feel such an account is interesting, and is not without its place, it does not have the richness of the earlier personal accounts and consequently is far less informative. This is another example of the accounts to which I refer when I write of the reinvention of a common narrative. It is simply not possible for such a piece to do justice to the diversity of experiences within the boundaries of what might be determined a shared culture. With some determination to preserve this quality of the site I responded:

When your students write about the festivals (just the ones that have already happened since Christmas 1998) it would be great if you could get them to do the following: Write short accounts in the first person of what they themselves did. To include something of their own ideas and opinions of the festival/celebration. e.g. do they like it?, has it become over-commercialised?, what does it mean to them?....look at our website for examples of similar work if it would help. We really want to emphasise people's own experiences as this is what is not available in text books and also this can form the basis of future interaction between participants.

(correspondence, 15 April 1999)

This effort was not in vain as we shortly received the following account:

I want to tell you how my family celebrated Christmas. The day before Xmas I made a Xmas tree: it is a real fir tree with

decorations and a big star on its top. After that I made the Presepe (crib): it represents the Sacred Family and the Nativity of the Child. When I got up on December 25th, I opened my presents. As a child I thought that Santa Claus brought the presents, it was quite disappointing to learn that he doesn't exist. At 11:30 a. m. we went to church. The Mass finished at about 13:00, then I came back home with my family. At 13:30 we had a big lunch with my relatives: we ate Tortellini (home made pasta) and roast lamb with roast potatoes. After lunch we opened the presents my uncles and aunts brought me. I love Christmas because all the family meet!!! In the evening, after dinner we all went to the main square to watch the big Xmas tree made by the town Council. On December 26th, we celebrated St. Stephen's day with our friends. On this day we usually meet our friends and play parlour games or bingo.

(Celebrate! website)

The above contribution accompanied a message from the contributor's teacher which explained that having looked at our website she better understood the aims of our project. In a later correspondence, the same teacher showed her regard for the project's capacity to transcend essentialist divisions:

I think this project can offer extraordinary chances to both teachers and students to overcome stereotypes and get to know other cultures from first hand experience

(Correspondence 9th July, 1999)

However, as the website reveals, it was not always so straightforward to get the style of information that we wanted. In the interests of inclusion, it was decided to display contributions that did not fulfil our intentions.

Challenging essentialism

Collecting the contributions for the *Celebrate!* website was clearly only the first step in the intended learning process. The displaying and sharing of that information, and the processes that it triggers, are evidently highly significant.

Given the above discussion relating to the need to locate other people, it was important to contextualise every contribution presented. Every contribution was thus accompanied by the name¹³ of the author and the school or group through which they were participating in the project. It was also possible, if so desired, to locate geographically the school/group concerned elsewhere on the website.

The particular details presented made way for a certain degree of ambiguity. For example, assumptions about the identity of Hong Kong participants (British ex-patriot or Chinese) could not be made. Also the celebration of a particular event could not readily be tied to religion, geographical location or “ethnicity”, thus challenging conventional divisions. The following two extracts are from two boys of the same (traditionally “English”) name, one living in England the other in Hong Kong. They describe their experiences of Chinese New Year.

On the day of the Chinese New Year we set off to [name] Street in [city]. This is the city's China Town. We got there at about 10 o'clock. It was quite busy. We went down the street to the Royal Circle, a Chinese restaurant, where we had something to eat. We

¹³ This was by first name only due to child protection conventions (see Atkinson, 1998).

went outside and we gathered round in a circle and we watched two Chinese people dancing traditionally. When that had finished we watched a dragon dancing. The dragon was blue. It was beautifully decorated with fine detail all over it. In the afternoon there were fire-crackers on every restaurant door. There was a man sitting next to every door ready to light the fuse. The noise was hair raising. After that we pretty much went home. It was a bigger occasion than when I went two years ago with more acts, dancing, juggling, cookery displays and far more people. I had a great time!

(Celebrate! website)

At Chinese New Year I played through the night. I played Playstation and watched television. We got to eat some delicious food and received lots of laisee. Also, my grandmother forced me to go to the temple. Holy! But I still like Chinese New Year!

(Celebrate! website)

The degree of information provided made comparison of individuals of ostensibly the same characteristics possible, exposing the multi-faceted nature of difference. See for example the following extracts by two children aged ten from the same school.

I spent my time in Chinese New Year getting laisee (lucky money).I get it in red packets. I also went to visit my grandparents. I hardly got any money though! My mom went to the bank to put the money in. I am saving it up for University. Guess how much I got .I'll give you 10 seconds 10 to 1..... 0: \$240. That's not much if you're rich, but I'm not!

(Celebrate! website)

For Chinese New Year we had a school holiday which lasted for one week. I didn't go anywhere out of the country but I visited lots of relatives like my dad's uncle and my mum's parents and so on. They gave me lots of lai see with lots of money in them. One of my relatives gave me one thousand dollars to me and my brother.

Altogether I got about two thousand some dollars during the holiday. The only problem was that we had to go all over Hong Kong because our relatives lived all over the place.

I bought lots of new clothes for the new year. I bought a Chinese costume, the old type which the older Chinese people used to wear. I also bought some long sleeve shirts because it was getting cold outdoors. I liked this Chinese New Year because I was with my family.

(Celebrate! website)

Celebrate! – the practical reality

It should not come as a surprise that despite (or perhaps because of) the high ideals, it has not yet been possible to fulfil completely the founding expectations of *Celebrate!*. I have painted above a picture of an attempt to translate the ideals of non-essentialism into practice. In the following discussion, as a means of offering greater insight into that process, I probe more deeply into the challenges that we met along the way and the consequences they had. It is in doing so that I hope to ensure that the discussion is rooted in the realities of the practical implementation of high-flown ideals.

There are four quite distinct areas that I address below: our management of controversial information; maximising the benefits of the resources available to us; evaluation of the project; and the integration of the school curriculum. I address each in turn.

Managing controversy and misinformation

As a general principle, the *Celebrate!* website was not censored by us as organisers. Equally, every effort was made to include all contributions presented to us. The aim was to establish working structures that would mean contributions were self-regulated. This was expressed clearly in the project report:

Our discussion and guidelines for writing were open-ended and gave scope for both positive and negative or controversial opinions to be expressed. In this vein the pupils were to self-regulate the content of their work. Children are given the further responsibility of dealing with posting questions and giving answers. In this interaction with others of differing cultural and religious and non-religious backgrounds, children will have the opportunity to challenge or consolidate their own views through comparing and contrasting them with those of others.

(*Celebrate!* project report, April 1999)

In practice, this meant the inclusion of some rather unusual or misinformed comments. For example, one particular collection of children became disproportionately concerned in their opinions of Christmas with the idea that it was the cause of suicide for many socially less advantaged people. This was left unchanged in the hope that it might prompt interesting discussion. Generally, the less conventional contributions added diversity and some interesting personal quirks. Although sometimes what might have appeared to be the main focus of the contribution was missed, no less information about life and culture was given. The following is an example of how, indeed, some events (New Year in this example) have little impact upon the lives of some young people today.

Hello my name is [name]. I am age 11, my school is called [name] School. My favourite sport is soccer. At New Year (1999) I went skiing in Japan. I also tried the snowboard but I kept falling so I gave up snowboarding. I gave up snowboarding because I didn't want to get hurt by falling too much. One week later I went to Macau to play firecrackers; by accident I poked my sister with a joss-stick. When I realized what I had done I started to laugh at my sister's jacket because the jacket had a big brown hole in it. She was very angry and she is still angry today.

(Celebrate! website)

Only on one occasion was a contribution deemed so offensive and misinformed that a recommendation for censorship (the only one they made) from the website hosts was recognised. This I felt was unfortunate, but given the limitations of the site in affording all of its visitors the necessary critical reading of the information posted, it was also necessary. The entry was returned to the teacher of the school concerned with an explanation and revisions were made. In an ideal situation no controversial material would be hidden but brought open for discussion and challenge. While this is possible within the context of a classroom, as I have just indicated, the nature of the website, or indeed any publication, makes the expression of highly controversial ideas problematic.

Managing limited resources

One of the greatest challenges in establishing our project was the limited access to the Internet available to most of our participants. The computing facilities in the main partner school dramatically improved throughout the course of the project and there were points at which we were systematically

able to give large numbers of children access to the site. This was however restricted, and meant that it was difficult to maintain activity on the important interactive “questions and answers” section of the site, vital to the development of critical thinking and the self-regulation of the site.

In terms of access to viewing the contents of the website, a frequently updated print out of the entire site was displayed on a prominent notice board in the school. We also provided a box for the posting of questions to go on the site, but not really having the same appeal as posing questions directly on-line, this was limited in its success. More direct involvement was made available at various points through a weekly after-school club, which by its nature, however, was only available to restricted numbers. Had not computers themselves, not only the Internet, been restricted we could have made wider access available to the site through use of one of the software packages now available for off-line viewing.

Given the limited access to computers alternative arrangements were made. Indeed, sometimes, the consequences of this were positive and the shortage of resources actually served to enhance the learning process.

When the IT suite wasn't occupied by other time-tabled lessons the children had the opportunity to go in their RE lesson and word-process their work. Pupils worked in pairs both because of the number of stations available, and the opportunities it gave for peer tutoring. This had a number of very positive outcomes. Children with more IT experience, often those with a computer at home, were able to help their partner and they learned to value and respect each other's opinions and experiences.

(Celebrate! project report, April 1999)

However, some of the partner schools were severely hampered by the fact that they had no computing facilities whatsoever. They were able to contribute only through the dedication of teachers prepared to spend their free time and personal resources.

Evaluation

I am very conscious of the fact that we have not yet developed a satisfactory means of evaluating the project. Traditional assessments with their outcome/knowledge orientation do not appear to be conducive to the non-essentialist aims I am advocating, nor to a process driven system such as I propose. Through efforts to avoid the damaging consequences and misinformation that attitudinal tests might result in (see Chapter 4) the tendency has been perhaps to rely too far on the anecdotal.

In terms of the work produced the participants were encouraged to be self-assessing and regulating through collaboration with peers. The quality of work produced was generally of a high standard in terms of content and literacy – an outcome we attributed to Internet publication. This also contributed to high motivation, with participants giving up their free time to produce work and visiting the local library and Internet Café on their own initiative to view work on-line. We were also encouraged by the wider community involvement the project promoted:

In particular, feedback from parents at parents' evening was unexpected and very positive. Some mentioned looking up their children's work from their offices and sharing it with friends and family. Parents, including the Lollipop Man, have also provided further links and personal contacts. We feel this is important in recognising the

value of parents and adult carers as co-educators, and involving them in school teaching and learning.

(*Celebrate!* project report, April 1999)

While a calculation of individual learning outcomes has been absent, I feel there is significant positive evidence to support the project. This is not least reflected by the fact that the website still receives around one hundred “hits” per week although it has been dormant for some months now.

More importantly, in my view, ongoing and informal evaluation, was a vital part of the teaching process as it sought to respond to the needs and interests of those involved. I explore this further in Chapter 7, as I discuss responsive practice. It was, however, not only the needs of the participants that had to be met, but, as I now go on to show, those of the formal education system.

Working with and around the curriculum

As a school based project, *Celebrate!* needed to develop in harmony with the curriculum. I discuss below how we worked with and around the curriculum in particular relation to the main partner school, which is in England. Reference, therefore, is made to the National Curriculum for England and Wales, herein after referred to as the National Curriculum.

While, the project was felt to contribute to a wide range of curriculum areas, particularly in the humanities, or, in the case of some schools, modern languages, the particular connections that we made were with English and RE. The link with English was more of an afterthought, as we searched for an opening through which to generate a more sustained involvement. The

majority of work (done within timetabled lessons) was in RE, the subject area for which the project was developed.

There were clear advantages to working within RE, aside from the fact that this was the main teaching area of my collaborator. In the Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988 RE is included as part of the “basic curriculum”. The significant consequence of this is that it is less prescriptive and less target-oriented.

Unlike the foundation subjects of the National Curriculum, RE has no prescribed national attainment targets, programmes of study or assessment arrangements so from this it is clear that RE has a unique place in the basis curriculum. (Bastide, 1999, p.36)

We found this particularly advantageous given that the learning was driven by objectives rather than being task-based.

In order to be flexible, planning revolved not around a series of tasks but of learning objectives. The key learning objectives are as follows:

to enable young people to reflect upon their own lives and experiences in relation to those of others, and to be critical and reflective in their thinking

to improve participants' communication by enhancing literacy, IT and co-operative communication skills

to encourage intercultural dialogue and the understanding of difference in effort to combat xenophobia and prejudice

(*Celebrate!* project report, April 1999)

These correspond well with the spiritual development aspect of RE, which Bastide (1999) relates to, among other things, celebration, the exploration of values, and developing understanding of self-identity in a world context. Equally, the cognitive content that he goes on to define is applicable:

knowledge of the central beliefs, ideas and practices of major world religions and philosophies

an understanding of how people sought to explain the universe through various myths and stories including religious, historical and scientific explanations

beliefs which are held personally and ability to give some account of them

behaviour and attitudes which show relationship between belief and action

personal response to questions about the purpose of life and to the experience of e.g. beauty and love or pain and suffering. (Bastide, 1999,p.55)

Although the work of *Celebrate!* was firmly embedded within the curriculum, given the limited room on the timetable, for RE in particular, we also ran the project as an extra-curricular activity, both after school and during breaks.

Exploring a future for school-based initiatives

I have expressed in this chapter the need to meet high ideals, to develop flexible and responsive learning practices that endow young people with a capacity to communicate with others beyond the confines of essentialism. This, however, can only become possible within the formal education sector if it can be seen to be compatible with government policy. Thus I conclude with a brief exploration of the possibilities offered (again in England and Wales) through the curriculum.

In the light of more recent policy developments, a project such as *Celebrate!* might more readily be connected with *Citizenship*, which from August 2002 will be a foundation subject of the National Curriculum (QCA, 2000a).

Citizenship, states the QCA (2000b) promotes children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This is demonstrated by the following extract from their website:

- *spiritual development*, through fostering pupils' awareness and understanding of meaning and purpose in life and of differing values in human society
- *moral development*, through helping pupils develop a critical appreciation of issues of right and wrong, justice, fairness, rights and obligations in society
- *social development*, through helping pupils acquire the understanding and skills needed to become responsible and effective members of society
- *cultural development*, through helping pupils understand the nature and role of the different groups to which they belong, and promoting respect for diversity and difference. (ibid.)

Cross-cultural exchange, I believe, has the potential to contribute to all of these. Encouragingly, there appears to be the opportunity to do so, as the curriculum guidelines relating to citizenship are uncharacteristically free from prescription. I describe below the ethos and approach proposed within the policy documents (see QCA 2000c and 2000d). A flexible and responsive approach to teaching and learning is advocated. It is proposed that the guidelines be interpreted loosely and adapted innovatively and non-sequentially to suit the particular circumstances of the school and those being taught. Importantly, it is made clear that the teaching style as well as the school ethos should embody the values that teaching promotes, and that the teaching of citizenship should form an integral part of each subject area. Again, encouragingly, this is broadly supportive of the proposals for practice that I make in Chapter 7.

In the same documents, learning is strongly connected to the development of skills as opposed to knowledge. The emphasis is on developing enquiry and communication, and participation and responsible action. However, perhaps because of the perceived ease of measuring, assessment is still based on knowledge and understanding not skills. This relates strongly to the evaluation dilemmas discussed in Chapters 4 and 7.

Chapter 6: Pushing at the limits: developing flexible boundaries through the arts

Through my involvement both as a participant and as an organiser in cross-cultural exchange projects where the programme has been managed by Beavers Arts, I have been continually impressed by their capacity to build inclusive and open groups, uniting the most unlikely combinations of people. The task of this chapter is to relate their practice to the demands of theory as developed in the previous chapters. I explore how in practical terms it might be possible to build flexibly defined groups (non-essentialist in conceptualisation) within a framework of face-to-face communication (dependent on rational categorisation). In doing so, I give detailed illustrations of working practices. These are offered not as a blueprint, but as a means of exploring the underlying principles or ethos of the working process.

I begin by revisiting key methodological and ethical issues, and explain how I have made use of and presented the data in the discussion that ensues. I follow this with an introduction to Beavers Arts and their work. Particular reference is made to one programme of their expanding European work, *Steps for Peace*. The enquiry is then developed through an in-depth study of a particular project within that programme – a residential youth exchange, *Walking through windows*.

Through detailed illustration of the project, I begin to explore the working practices in operation. In doing so I identify what I consider to be significant defining dimensions of the work. I am referring here not to the particular

techniques and exercises used nor to a given step-by-step process by which to work, but to the underlying principles that guide both technique and process in relation to specific contexts. I then continue the investigation with a more general illustrated discussion of the principles identified; the working ethos. In drawing conclusions, I make preliminary comments on the understandings of good practice in preparation for the fuller discussion of this issue in Chapter 7.

Methodological and ethical issues

In the following paragraphs I revisit key points made in Chapter 2 in relation to data collection, as well as making particular reference to the manner in which I have used that data and presented it throughout this chapter.

My role in *Walking through windows* can best be described as that of participant observer. The nature of my involvement in the project (in addition to researching it) was partially organisational and partially participatory; by which I mean, while I attended planning meetings and played some part in organising domestic arrangements and offering support to individual group members, I did not run any of the sessions and took part in many of them just as any other participant on the project might have done. I was quite open in my role as a researcher, though I did not make a point of stating this to the group as a whole (see the discussion of consent in Chapter 2). Given the varied levels of organisational involvement and responsibility of the other participants, I feel confident that my role did not appear an unusual one.

During the residential project I attended the majority of workshop sessions and the planning/evaluation discussions between the Beavers Arts directors

that took place between workshops. These were recorded in a combination of detailed field notes and audio recordings. In addition, I made audio recordings of informal interviews about particular workshops with the directors, generally immediately prior to and/or just following a workshop session concerned.

Following the residential project, I transcribed the audio material and began an initial analysis of the data collected. Within weeks I was discussing issues that had arisen with the directors of Beavers Arts, with whom I was in close contact. More general discussion culminated in a two-hour informal interview with all three directors. This was recorded and transcribed. Clearly, in the discussion that follows, it would be neither possible nor relevant to give a complete analysis of the project. Instead I have chosen aspects of the project to use as detailed illustration of more general concepts that have arisen.

The above data is supported by information taken from a wide variety of documentation relating to Beavers Arts – application forms, reports and articles. Also, I have reported on the comments made by participants (recorded with their permission) in the final evaluation session of the residential project. As important as any of the data I have collected is my inside knowledge of Beavers Arts, acquired through many years of involvement in their work and friendship with the directors. Not only did this make the study possible, but it has given me a particular perspective from which to present my account. On this matter, I would like to reiterate the fact that the following analysis does not attempt to offer an unbiased account, nor to be a source from which proofs can be drawn. Equally, although I set out

with the conviction that I was observing good practice, the account is not an exercise in eulogy. The study has been used as an illustrative tool, a means of developing and probing the reality of my theoretical aspirations.

On a more practical note, I will now briefly explain the manner in which the data is presented. Any quotations (taken from transcripts) are indicated as such and accompanied by a date and a context. Participants' comments are all taken from the final evaluation meeting and quite specifically relate to the recounting of "one positive thing" or "one negative thing" about the project, or a memory shared with the group. The interviews are with the three directors of Beavers Arts who, as I am, are indicated by their initials. Those extracts from interviews dated in December were conducted over the course of the residential project in discussion of workshop sessions and working practices. Those extracts from interviews dated in January relate to the extended follow-up interview. The informal and loosely structured nature of the interviews means it has sometimes not been easy to put a clear context before a meaningful quote, as most comments did not arise out of a direct question.

Before I make any further comment, I would like to remind the reader that, at the wish of the main collaborators in the research, the project is presented under its real name. As I discussed in Chapter 2, I have, however, not named any individuals other than the directors.

Setting the scene

Beavers Arts

Beavers Arts, now in its sixteenth year of operation, is a small arts and education charity that 'exists to sustain, develop, and enrich the lives of individuals, groups and communities through activities that contribute to cultural democracy' (Beavers Arts NLCB application, 2000, p.5). Towards this end, the charity's three directors, Gill Gill, Hilary Hughes and Susan Clarke (respectively theatre director/writer, theatre designer, and performer), together with others drawn from a large pool of freelance artists and other professionals, work on an enormous variety of projects, with a huge diversity of people, and in broad array of unusual settings.

We use group work, training projects, music, photography, words, murals, banners, reminiscence and cultural exchange to work for tolerance, communication and cooperation between people. Projects share practical transferable skills; explore community and personal history; create community events and celebrations; make books, exhibitions and videos. (ibid.)

A fruitful relationship of cross-cultural exchange with Italian partners, L'Arvicola, since 1990 has lent an international dimension to Beavers Arts' work. In particular, as a direct outcome of shared theatre, video and cultural projects, this partnership has led to further collaboration with groups and individuals in Central and Eastern Europe, much of which has extended far beyond the youth exchange experiences that form the focus of the following discussion.

Steps for Peace

1995 was a significant year in the development of Beavers Arts' European work. The participation of a young Hungarian woman on an Italian exchange project and L'Arvicola's invitation to Mostar both had their part to play. The former led to an invitation to Beavers Arts to work on a multilateral exchange in Obanya, Hungary; the latter led to Beavers Arts invitation to work in Mostar, Bosnia Herzegovina (BiH). In 1996, in Hungary and in BiH, the two resultant projects launched an ongoing programme of collaboration.

We call this *Steps for Peace*, knowing that the long journey towards a peaceful Europe, like the thousand mile journey of the proverb, starts with the first step... (Beavers Arts Celebrating Europe proposal, 1998).

There have now been twelve *Steps for Peace* projects, in five countries (BiH, Hungary, Italy, Romania, and UK), involving diverse people from eleven countries (Australia, BiH, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Spain, UK, and USA). The most recent, taking place in December 1999 in Staffordshire, was the second leg of a bilateral exchange with Italy. It is on this project that the chapter draws most heavily.

Walking through windows

In December 1999, with just a couple of weeks to go to the year 2000, a group of young Europeans gathers at Stanley Head at the edge of the Peak District. Like all travellers, they bring baggage, their shared and different pasts. And like all travellers, they have a destination in mind, though they may not be able to say what and where it is. Together, they will take stock, and in an act of audacious creativity, step into a possible future. (Beavers Arts, publicity flyer, 1999)

From Tuesday 14th to Wednesday 22nd December, a (fluctuating) group of around thirty people lived and worked together. Everybody shared in domestic

tasks and workshops in performance, design and “making”, and music. By the second night the whole group was assisting in a local lantern procession – finishing and carrying lanterns, playing in a percussion band, stewarding the public. By 21st December, the shortest night of the year was celebrated through the group’s collaboration with a local youth theatre and a women’s singing group, in a public performance of lanterns, theatre, puppets, music and song. On 22nd December participants were, tearfully in many cases, embarking on a journey back home, but perhaps not exactly back to their previous lives.

I begin the analysis that follows with an exploration of the group. I briefly introduce the constitution of the group and its dynamic nature as contributory factors to developing an inclusive group with open borders. Following this, attention is focussed on working practice. I begin with an illustrative account of one aspect of the exchange project – a collaboration with a local youth theatre. I draw from this illustration those principles that I feel underlie the work, and I go on to explore these in more detail.

The group

I had long felt that one of the great strengths of Beavers Arts’ work was its capacity for inclusion, for making people belong to a group – a feeling shared by others:

Once I started work, I was accepted by everyone as a part of the company, made welcome and trusted with many things. (Clare Collins, 2000, unpublished BA placement report, University of Strathclyde, p.6)

On the final day of *Walking through windows*, as the group was gathered

together sharing memories and thoughts on the project that had passed, I felt confident that this had been achieved. If my own memories of the past eight days were not sufficient, comments from the others present convinced me. Of the thirty three people present at the evaluation session, when asked to say one positive and one negative thing about the project, twenty-eight chose to mention the group, or the other people, as a positive factor. Negative comments, on the contrary, were largely refined to the practical – lack of time, lack of sleep, the weather. Alternatively, a common complaint was having to leave, today.

It was clear that not only had good personal friendships been formed but that the group as a whole had come together, and what is more, that this was recognised and seen as important by members of the group. The following are examples of the “one positive factor” put forward by different participants:

There weren't any groups, people weren't little groups, it was all mixed up together really nicely

(Project evaluation, 22nd December 1999, participant's comment)

The positive thing is that although some of us already met in the past it was not exclusive

(Project evaluation, 22nd December 1999, participant's comment)

a positive thing is that the group mixed up

(Project evaluation, 22nd December 1999, participant's comment)

It was clear that this sense of an open and friendly group was accompanied by feelings of trust

*just the atmosphere really I've just been able to sit in a room say
with everybody and just do nothing and be just be happy*

(Project evaluation, 22nd December1999, participant's comment)

I've found a lot of new people to talk to who will listen to me

(Project evaluation, 22nd December1999, participant's comment)

The opportunity to share a memory with the group, which also formed a part of the evaluation session, brought comments supportive of this relaxed and inclusive sense of a group:

*my memory is of being here with everyone the fact that no matter
what language barriers there are we get over it*

(Project evaluation, 22nd December1999, participant's comment)

*I remember that no matter what room you walked into there was
always laughter.*

(Project evaluation, 22nd December1999, participant's comment)

The sense of importance that I attach to a strong sense of group once sat uncomfortably in my mind alongside the belief that a group is not a group without a boundary, that inclusion means an excluded other. Could it be, I found myself asking, that this group-building capacity was undesirable, another example of exclusion under the guise of inclusion? Theoretically, as I showed in Chapter 4, I resolved this issue – groups are acceptable, indeed a necessity; problematic only when defined in essentialist terms. My object here is to explore how *practice* might generate non-essentialist groups; flexible notions of difference.

Layers of difference

If the “facts” about the participants are considered, at a superficial glance the potential for such cohesion seems limited. A disparate collection of individuals had been brought together who could be placed in any number of different social categories. By way of illustration, there were people to fill all of the following “boxes”: homeless, mentally ill, unemployed, postgraduate student, undergraduate student, school student, engineer, artist, professional actor, first-time performer, experienced exchange goer, inexperienced traveller, male, female, learning disabled, heterosexual, bisexual, gay, vegetarian, non-vegetarian, tall, short, plump, slim... the list could go on. Represented within this were young people, aged 17-29 from four countries (and representing more ethnic and national identities) some of whom, at the beginning of the project, knew no other person in the group, others who were being reunited with some old and dear friends. Inclusion into the equation of the professionals from Beavers Arts, who ran the programme; the local youth theatre group and the women’s singing group, that the exchange group worked alongside; and myself, as a participant and researcher, widens the diversity further, not least for introducing an age-range spanning half a century.

This incongruous mixture, however, did not arise by chance. It is indicative of Beavers Arts’ genuine commitment to social inclusion. Clearly, within this understanding social inclusion implies (i.e. is dependent on) working with everybody, not just those marginalized and already labelled as “excluded”.

we work to create integrated projects in which people with varying degrees of ability, experience, personal resources, and from various ethnic, religious and social backgrounds can actively work together. (Beavers Arts, NLCB proposal, 2000, p.7).

Inclusion can only be a process of working across those already too harshly imposed divides. This is a belief not only founded in an egalitarian ideology, but in the reality of practical experience that demonstrates that every individual within a group benefits from greater diversity in the group's composition.

The directors are keen to make explicit the gains to be found through working with a diverse group. Clearly, they feel that this was a beneficial contribution to the flexible and inclusive nature of the group created. This was made explicit in the follow-up interview:

SC: I wondered if one of the strengths of the group, and of not having this sense of "we are the group and you are the people outside it" was the fact that there was such a mixture within the group. So OK there's some people who are experienced performers, there are some who aren't, there was some people who are experienced exchange goers, there are some who aren't, there are some who've just walked out of a homeless project there are some who are...

HH: ...and it doesn't matter who you are. There are this many on Prozac, and this many that aren't, there are some who have always know each other and those that have never met anybody...

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

I would add to this by suggesting that such a layering of overlapping aspects of identity forces individuals, albeit on a subconscious level, to question the over-simplification of their categorisation system, to recognise an individual's

own characteristics and to see those as formed on a complex level rather than over-determined by a single aspect of identity (see Chapter 4). This is vital as increasing the complexity of our stereotypes and questioning our unconscious assumptions about the homogeneity of broadly defined groups, are essential aspects of successful communication (Gudykunst, 1998). Equally, however, the artifice of the exchange setting and its removal from everybody's homes, gives individuals a freedom to leave behind some aspects of themselves and only reveal to the group whatever information they chose. Here an international element can help to disguise what might normally be restrictive social barriers.

Flexible borders

In addition to the composition of the group, the manner in which the group is encouraged to be flexible and adaptive through the continually evolving reality of who is included within the group is also significant. From a discussion regarding the relationship of the individual to the group, the artists came to express the importance they attach to ensuring the group is not in any way reified. The following extract shows how the conversation developed to explore what might contribute to the creation of an inclusive flexible group free from the burden of notions of superiority over other groups.

AS: Do you think it's because you keep introducing different people - "oh by the way Loudmouth Women who are mates with so and so are coming in..."

GG: ..."and they're mostly women over 50, but don't worry about it."

HH: I think it's all to do with where exactly we are now [in the Limousin] which is that we're on the boundary between two cultures - the culture that does custom and practice and the culture that does statute and law. And I think we're severely in the custom and practice

GG: [inaudible]

HH: and we're in a group that say the custom of practice of this group is that it's a group, and it introduces people and "look here comes another one, and there comes another one and that one's gone and she's gone and oh dear! and that one had to go back to Spain" [...] and we say goodbye to her, and we're a group again

GG: "she's still part of the group, she's gone but never mind"

HH: and not by the law that says these are the signed up members of the statutory group

GG: and yet we will constantly actually reinforce the contract with them [...]

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Evidently, it is more than the composition of a group that governs its nature. The remainder of the chapter is largely devoted to exploring the atmosphere, working ethos, and methods that contribute to the development of secure yet flexible and inclusive groups. The nine-day success of building the group in the *Walking through windows* project is used as a basis from which to make this exploration.

Beavers Arts in action

The ethos of Beavers Arts' work is illustrated in the following paragraphs, extracted from a piece written by one of the directors, explaining the importance of their work in Mostar.

Beavers Arts' practice is aimed at the individual but always the individual in a group context, using arts techniques (video, theatre, painting a mural, making a book, puppet shows, community celebrations...) to bring diverse people together in a common enterprise.

Significantly, contact alone is insufficient to build trust, understanding or community cohesion – if this were the case, the recent wars in Yugoslavia would not have been able to happen in a country where inter-ethnic contacts were ubiquitous. Rather, the way the contact is managed, the group work methods and techniques used cannot be neutral, but actively work towards building links and reinforcing positive attitudes.

Beavers Arts has developed projects, techniques and activities with diverse individuals (and groups) that make possible unusual and unexpected liaisons and alliances that affect practical actions as much as convictions or beliefs. They are based on a mixture of self-expression, confidence building and empowerment and the creation of group solidarity that can have real effects on individuals' lives.

(Beavers Arts NLCB proposal, 2000, supplementary information)

The techniques and working methods referred to above are complex and interlaced. Thus an exploration of them is equally complex. Once again the task is to find a balance between an account rendered meaningless through reductionism, and one that preserves so many complexities that it is purely descriptive. In attempt to overcome this, I begin by describing a particular element of the project. In doing so I identify principles of practice that appear significant in the work. I then go on to develop the discussion and offer a more in-depth exploration of each of the aspects identified.

Emu world – an illustration

“Emu World” reads the sign as a traveller clammers through a window into an unusual and unknown land. A probing hand, then a leg, elbow, shoulder, back, bottom... sprout from an unidentifiable mound on the floor, each

disappearing as unexpectedly as it appeared. A pause, and life gradually erupts in the form of ten untameable emus. The comic gaggle of birds, some unfeasibly small and others unreasonably large, and all suitably lacking coordination, forms a line as the bewildered traveller attempts to impart to the audience her superior knowledge of emus. The rebellious birds refuse to be tamed and ridicule their instructor through exaggerated performances of actions in complete contradiction to her words. Although the emus “NEVER” scratch, squawk, wiggle their bottoms, or flap their wings, they do eventually tire of their instructor whom they chase away. They return and display their triumph with the *Emu Macarena*.

This small scene at the Christmas party-style performance saw Italian, French and English exchange participants, working alongside the youth theatre group on whose home patch the performance took place, and a professional actress from Beavers Arts (Susan). The youth theatre had been working with Beavers Arts for the ten weeks prior to the exchange, on one after-school session per week. As well as producing lanterns, the group of six to twelve year olds had also rehearsed being untameable emus and, in their free time, had devised the *Emu Macarena*. On Sunday 19th December, there was a one hour session in which the cast of the above scene were able to come together as a group for the first time. On the evening of Tuesday 22nd, following two further short sessions, the scene was performed to a very appreciative audience. It was an experience that none will be quick to forget, not least the youth theatre members who, at the start of a video project nine months later, were asking Beavers Arts if any Italians were coming this time.

First encounters

I certainly remember the first session well, and barely need my field notes to recall its detail. Those exchange participants who had opted to do a lot of performing, alongside Gill, Susan and a handful of others interested in stage managing or working with the children, bundled into a minibus and cars and turned up at the community centre to meet the youth theatre. There were several purposes to the session, Gill had informed me, not least for the children in the youth theatre to “meet the foreigners”, as they had been promised, and to work together with them in some way. It had initially been hoped that there would have been a lot more opportunity for this but school term dates were not conducive to such a plan. Despite the limited possibilities, every effort was made to preserve this element of the exchange programme. Gill was very clear about the importance of the two groups working together. Following the session she explained to me:

GG: It gave the [exchange] group the chance to see what it's like working with someone who's outside their group and to start to think of them as real people you can incorporate into your project, and not just as a separate entity.
(Interview, 19th December 2000)

As such, the interaction between the groups is seen to have a significant role in the development of an open and inclusive group.

The following is an account of the first session run with both groups. On account of various practical and logistical problems, time was restricted to a one-hour session, which limited the scope for activities. Extracts from an

interview with Gill immediately following the session supplement my description of its content and intent, as well as more general comments from the follow-up interview.

Introductions

The directors of Beavers Arts make very clear the importance of ensuring everybody is introduced to each other properly. This was a matter raised in discussion with them in the follow-up interview.

AS: {...}every time a new person came into the group you were very conscious about making sure that everybody got introduced properly to everybody that came in

HH: yep, yep. Well there's nothing worse is there [than not being properly introduced to a group]? There's nothing worse

GG: especially if you're a foreigner and you can't say their name

SC: It's back to the old host gestures - everyone's got to be introduced...

HH: it's diplomatic

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Once again I am conscious that I am commenting upon things that appear almost too obvious to be worthy of attention. However, I do not doubt the significance of this very basic determination to ensure nobody is left unintroduced. Also, I have very clear recollections of participating in events where, to the detriment of the group dynamics, this simple gesture has not been observed.

Significantly, on this occasion the encounter was operating on several levels – the introduction of individuals to each other, the introduction of individuals to a new group and the introduction of two independent groups to each other¹⁴. This was something of which Gill was very conscious throughout the session, as she explained to me afterwards:

GG: I wanted to give all the kids [in the youth theatre] the chance to feel that they weren't losing their group, that they still had their own group, that it wasn't just that we were walking all over them, that we still like them and, you know, we're still their friends. And it's a chance to meet new friends, not to go "we've got all these nice foreigners now, so I don't need you, I'm not interested in you", or whatever...

(Interview, 19th December 2000)

While the members of the two groups were being asked to cooperate and to form a new group, this was not to subsume either the identities of the individuals or of the groups that constituted this larger group.

Exercises and games

Beavers Arts place an emphasis on “doing things together”, most particularly theatre, as means of giving people the opportunity to know each other. The advantages of theatre as a tool for collaboration were recognised by one exchange participant who identified the following positive feature of the exchange project:

¹⁴ The processes discussed below, as I will go on to explore, are already implicit in the manner of

Meeting people. And the way theatre makes this possible.

(Project evaluation, 22nd December 1999, participant's comment)

In relation to the first emu session, particularly important in my mind was the use of collaborative theatre exercises. Here I will focus on introducing the nature of those exercises employed. This is largely to provide a point of reference for future discussion, and should not be viewed as a presentation of "how to get groups working together". As I will consider in greater depth in Chapter 7, I cannot stress strongly enough the overwhelming importance attached to *how* exercises are used and the manner in which they are introduced. This is perhaps even more significant than the exercises themselves.

Further to the above, in this context the fact that the exercises used were familiar to both groups is of significance. Importance, therefore, is attached not only to the nature of the exercises themselves but to the introduction to a shared culture or *common practice* that was embedded in them. I go on to explore this concept further below, but for the time being I feel an introduction to the exercises and games to which I am referring would aid understanding.

A light-hearted game, known to everybody, got the session off to a very positive start. "Zip, zap, boing", despite its apparent frivolity, is a game that requires cooperation, concentration, and communication. The group begins by forming an inward-looking circle. One person passes a "zip" with and

introduction.

energetic pointing action to an adjacent person. The recipient may then continue to pass the “zip” (in the direction in which it is travelling), “zap” across the room to another person (with a double handed point), or “boing” it back in the direction it came from (with both arms raised and a wobble). If everybody is not sufficiently aware of the others around them, then the game is quickly reduced to a shambles. In this context there were many advantages attached to this particular game, not least that it provided some energetic activity for some over-excited young people, while at the same time enabling interaction free from language or other communication barriers, and providing a focus for their energy.

The second exercise “entering the space”, or “light bulbs” as the exercise is known to the youth theatre, is a much calmer exercise that develops many of the same skills as “zip, zap, boing”. From the familiar, democratic starting point (the circle) each member of the group is given the opportunity to step into the circle and *be present* (“switch on their light bulb”), look every member of the group in the eye, and pronounce their own name before resuming their neutral (“switched off”) position in the circle. In the course of the activity, everybody thus assumes the roles both of actor and audience.

“Running like the wolf” was the third exercise (also one familiar to both groups) employed in the session. Learned from work with an Australian performer and adapted to suit Beavers Arts needs, this is a calm but energetic group exercise. It facilitates recognition of the particular within the group through generating communication between every individual and every other

individual in the group. The group, once again, forms a circle. From this point everybody turns to face the back of the person to one side of them, thus transforming the circle into a line of people one behind the other. The person leading the exercise breaks away from the circle and is followed by everybody in line, running softly and sustainably “like the wolf”. In this manner the group is calmly led around the space. On the lead person’s initiative, a sharp turn sees the line reel back upon itself everybody in the group raising a hand to greet every other member with a smile and a clapped hand. As the exercise continues, initiated by the person at the front, words are also employed with the clap being accompanied by “Ciao”, “Bonjour”, “Dobar dan”, “Hello”, or indeed any other greeting.

In writing these descriptions I have felt keenly the inability to adequately describe these simple exercises, not to lose the flavour of the exercise amid step-by-step description. Although I may not have done justice to the exercises I hope to have provided clear points of reference for the ensuing discussions. Also, I have been reminded of the importance of “learning by doing” (as opposed to learning from dry written descriptions). This is a theme I explore further in Chapter 7.

The emu performance

Performance had a very important part to play in group development in the *Walking through windows* project. There was a significant element of performance in this first session, not only did the youth theatre perform their emu scenes to a new audience, from the exchange project, but that group got

training in “how to be an emu”. The performance from the youth theatre was judged to have been a success, both for the exchange group who appeared to enjoy it and for the youth theatre themselves.

GG: It gave the [youth theatre] group a chance to realise how much they'd done and show it off. It worked out really well because they didn't show off in a negative way - they showed off in a really positive way.

(Interview, 19th December 2000)

Following the performance, Gill made a decision to run emu auditions to select the exchange participants who would perform with the youth theatre. The idea was one that arose out of the context and the situation at the moment, which is indicative of the flexible and responsive working practices of Beavers Arts. I discussed this with Gill following the session:

GG:...Because we're going to incorporate some of the exchange people into a scene the kids have done, it struck me I would let the kids choose who did that.

AS: was that something you decided before?

GG: I think it was decided on the spot, at the point at which I went, well we've got to decide who does it - because I wanted everybody to have a go at being an emu.[...] Had all the kids and the group been there at 9.30 we would have done something different.

(Interview, 19th December 2000)

The empowerment this brought to the youth theatre, as they gathered together with Susan to form the panel of judges, is also typical of Beavers Arts' approach. Suddenly all of us from the exchange group (being a “researcher” gave me no exemption) found ourselves lined up for the

commencement of the emu auditions. In turn we were called to strut across the space in our best emu fashion. The atmosphere was light hearted and comic, rather than competitive, as a parade of large adults entertained themselves and the youth theatre with their emu antics, becoming more exaggerated and ridiculous in response to the demands of the youth theatre members. This is an experience recalled fondly by an exchange participant in the final evaluation meeting of the project:

I remember also the emu auditions with Gill and Susan leading with the children the auditions and "was it good?", "could we have more wings?"

(Project evaluation, 22nd December 1999)

Following a post-audition discussion a consensus was reached among the youth theatre members and three emus selected to join their team for the public performance. There was just time for another quick rehearsal of the *Emu Macarena* before the session ended.

And, what happened next...

The first session had run very successfully, and Gill and Susan felt very pleased with the progress that was made. This is not, however, to say that this collaboration was problem-free. The next session (in which between us we had to create another scene for the performance with puppets made by the youth theatre) was less relaxed. The novelty of "the foreigners" had worn off and maintaining any kind of focus or attention was a challenge. This problem was augmented by the belief held by some members of the youth theatre that translations being made from Italian to English and vice-versa

were an unnecessary irritation. There was no conception of the fact that some people do not easily speak English.

In spite of this, on the evening of the performance the scenes ran according to plan and the collaboration was an evident success. One ten-year old member of the youth theatre said to me in conversation following the show how nervous she had been but how much she enjoyed herself once it started and how proud she felt now it had finished.

The above description is illustrative of the style of work and the methods employed throughout the project. In the discussion that follows, I draw upon those elements that I feel offer particular insight into the process of building open and flexible groups and, drawing upon further practical illustration, I undertake a more in-depth analysis of Beavers Arts' working practices.

Responsive working practice

It will already have become clear from the above illustration that there is a complex process of working going on in which many overlapping aims, outcomes, techniques and methods are intermeshed. For the sake of exploring the working process and lending it some clarity, there is a need to impose a system of categorisation. What I hope to create are categories that allow for flexible and overlapping boundaries, such as those which I advocate

in societal divisions. In doing so I hope to escape the reductionist tendencies of the “tick-box”¹⁵.

I begin by illustrating the nature of Beavers Arts’ working practice, namely the flexibility and sensitivity employed in implementing techniques and exercises. I do this in order to have the opportunity to reiterate the point that what follows is not a set of exercises or techniques that guarantees success, but an introduction to some tools that need to be applied appropriately in order to be effective. It is the process of application that I consciously emphasise throughout the ensuing discussion.

GG: we always do what the situation is suggesting to us. We always let ourselves be present in the situation. That sounds terribly poncey.

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

This responsiveness to the situation operates on many levels simultaneously, and influences practice both in terms of the immediate (which exercise to do now and the manner in which to conduct it) and the more general (the content of the project and its final performance).

For example, in the first workshop of the *Walking through windows* project, Gill introduced the “entering the space” exercise (described above) in a manner particular to that situation and context.

¹⁵ A critique of “tick-box” guidance is given in Chapter 7.

GG: [...] I deliberately chose to let people go in their own time, rather than going round the circle, as we would normally do it.
(Interview, 17th December 1999)

We also discussed this in the follow-up interview, in relation to the vulnerability of the group.

GG: [...] but I just actually looked round and went "oh Jesus I can't ask them to do this" so....

AS: well it's being sensitive to who the people are in your group isn't it?

GG: yeah, and in another group you might push them to do it and go "just shut up and do it" because...

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Being sensitive and responsive is an ongoing process that recognises the changing dynamics within a group and always responds to the people and the context as it is at that moment, rather than as they are presumed to be.

GG: I deliberately left it. I said has everybody been in, but I didn't go round [and] ask if everybody had gone, but I wouldn't at that point check - obviously later in the week, working with a group, I would check but I wouldn't want to check at this point, and make people feel they were under pressure.

(Interview, 17th December 1999)

Flexibility has also to be a question of allowing oneself to let go of ideas and ambitions where they are no longer appropriate. For example, it had been anticipated that the *Walking through windows* project would involve a lot of "making" (constructing props, sets, lanterns, shadow puppets) with an extra work room away from the performance space available for this. In practice,

the overwhelming majority of attention was performance focused. This, explained Hilary in the follow-up interview, came as a real surprise - she had long been intending to take advantage of the working space available at the residential centre to focus on making things with the group.

The decision to focus on performance was led largely by the group's skills and interests, as Susan explained:

SC: [...] those decisions really came out of the fact that we gave people choices and went "so what do you want to do?" and they all jumped into the performance group and we only had a few who wanted to do making.

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

On a more micro level, accepting change and difference enables a director to draw positively from misunderstandings, and bring richness to the development of the performance.

GG: sometimes you think you know what you want [...] and then somebody does something which is utterly not what you meant (which is generally a failure of your own communication) and it is completely fab, and you keep it. This is where directing this kind of thing is different.

(Interview, 19th December 2000)

Below, I explore in more detail, the processes by which the *Walking through windows* performance was generated, and comment more generally on the way in which Beavers Arts works with diverse groups of people. I begin by considering the use of a final performance as this plays a pivotal role in many of Beavers Arts' projects, including the one in question.

Performance

On the evening of Friday 17th December, with less than four days before the final performance the team – the three directors of Beavers Arts, and the musical director for the project, Greg Stephens – sits down to discuss the plan. There are certain givens – the venue; the time (7.00pm Tuesday 21st); the groups involved (exchange participants, Loudmouth Women, the youth theatre, the Barracks Band) but there are still questions over exactly which individuals, and there are possible other groups; some art forms (the youth theatre's partly-made pink puppets, a small lantern procession, two short scenes with the youth theatre, an *Emu Macarena*, and two sets of songs from Loudmouth Women). The exchange also has a theme – “Towards 2000”, and a title – “Walking through windows”. There is an agreement that this focus on the notion of the passage of time, rather than New Year, with the idea “where do you come out when you climb through a window?”.

Drawing from past Beavers Arts shows, the above “givens”, and from the project so far, a notion is already developed of what form the performance might take – a cross between a sit-down show and a Christmas party. As such, the audience members are to be seated informally at tables alongside members of the cast between their scenes. The wide variety of music and performance will be held together by some kind of framing device, such as story tellers or entertainers. Aside from the details of what takes place, is the concern to ensure that all who want to be are enabled to get on the stage and feel confident and present as human beings.

Rather than describing further the details of the performance, I move straight to consider the function of the performance in the exchange and the contribution it made to the development of the group. Reflecting their relative importance, the main emphasis of the discussion is on the processes that the act of creating a performance enabled, rather than the content of the end product.

So, how was it possible to get from the above pool of resources to a spectacular and coherent evening's entertainment of performance, puppets, procession, song, music, masks, and more (in several languages), appreciated by an audience yet more diverse than the performers?

The performance fulfils many functions, not least in providing the opportunity for the processes described below. Having a public event to work towards brings a very clear focus and motivation for all the group's activities, as well as providing a natural rhythm or framework for the project – the gradual build-up to the peak of the performance, and the sense of achievement and the opportunity for reflection that follows.

The performance also seems to bring greater clarity and power to processes that have been underlying the work throughout the project. It is as though the performance manifests and suddenly makes explicit understandings that may have been forming on a more unconscious level.

GG: And it's sort of hard, because you don't actually realise that actually it's all fine and spot on and lovely until you've done the show

HH: and that's what [a long-standing exchange participant and organiser] said about it.

GG: [She] said that a long, long while ago "and I like doing projects with Beavers. It always seems a complete mess and I never know what's going to happen and then it's all alright".

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Augmenting this is the power of a good, well-directed performance to enable individuals to demonstrate talents that might normally go unrecognised.

The positive thing is that I've met so many different people and I just started to understand them and saw their potential on stage explode in a wonderful way. It was a lesson in modesty for me

(Participant's comment, project evaluation, 22nd December 1999)

While this might be recognised by the participants themselves, the real power of the exposure of well-concealed talent comes when it is not recognised as such; when the audience sees the performance as easily created and natural. As a director, Gill is determined that the audience ought not to recognise the difficulties the group has surmounted.

GG: In the end, the audience shouldn't be going "gosh they've had to work hard".

(Interview, 19th December 2000)

While I have given little detail of the performance itself and argued for the greater significance of processes leading to the performance, this is not intended to imply that the quality and contents of the performance is unimportant. Generating the contents of the performance is an integral part of the process, as I describe below. The quality and artistic merit of the performance governs the positive feeling of the group and thus the learning

outcomes. As a director, Gill is clear that it is a belief in the quality of the performance that drives the processes that generate it.

GG: I have to believe in the show or I couldn't access the necessary energy. It must have some artistic merit and be worthwhile.
(Interview, 19th December 1999)

I now go on to explore how the content of the performance is generated through a process of observation and reflection; as a response to particular individuals and a particular context.

Observing and reflecting back

Rather than Beavers Arts arriving with a preconceived notion of a performance that the exchange group will learn to perform, the whole project is a process of generating that performance. The performance is created through the people present, in the context in which they are situated. As such, it carries an enormous amount of meaning and depth of feeling, and is a very honest and meaningful creation of special relevance to the particular situation. In parallel with discussions in Chapter 5, it is a process of working with “raw” experiences from people’s lives, rather than one of working with the narratives of what certain “types” of people have experienced. For the artists it is a question of arriving in a situation and observing who and what is there and what is going on, and reflecting that back through performance:

SC: We honestly try to reflect the situation as it is now, not as in some imagined past where we're trying to experience things we didn't experience, nor yet in some unhappy future or

fantasy world that doesn't really exist. It is only a very truthful observation of the situation now.

GG: as we see it
(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Through indirect and unthreatening means, opportunities were generated for people to express and reflect upon their beliefs and values and those of others. This was not attempted through asking people to recount narratives or to expose themselves and their prejudices through direct questioning. This material was then worked with and explored by the group.

For example, towards the end of their first workshop session, the exchange participants were asked to divide into four small groups, each given one of the following headings from which to produce a list of words: "things I want to leave behind in the past"; "things I want to keep from the past"; "things I want in the future"; "fears for the future". The task of the groups was not to discuss or agree on things, but to collect a list of whatever anybody thought of, whether funny, frivolous, serious, sad, tragic, personal, political... anything at all. After the session the words, from "potatoes" to "peace", were translated into all the languages known to the group. The following day they formed the basis of improvisation, as Gill explained prior to the session:

GG: [...] taking the words I got yesterday, I want to generate material and say "show me that with no words", "show me that thing you want to leave behind", "show me those things", "OK that's very literal, now show me it in another way". I don't know how I'll do that yet because I want to talk to Susan. I do know how I'll do it probably, but I'll make it up as I go along. So it will be

their content and building things up, but what I want to do this afternoon, because it's a longer session, is to mix quite jokey things, quick and ideas based things, with some quite serious stuff [...]

(Interview, 17th December 1999)

In this way it is possible to work with very genuine issues and ideas, however frivolous they may appear. This working from a basis of raw ideas uncensored by our conscious selves, is what appears to bring real depth to a performance and a sense of ownership from the group. The success of this depends upon trust between the performer and the director and the director's faith in the end product.

SC:[...] something that often happens to me as a performer when Gill directs us is where I feel like I'm most like a participant. She goes "say a thing that means..." or "give me a word that means blah" and you go "bleblah blah" and you think, "oh shit! That was crap, oh my God..." and all of that. Or, "can I go back and change that to the fork?"

GG: and I go "let's stick with the jug"

SC: and I go "Oh no the fork and the knife and.. the bread knife and look at the rolling pin over here." And she says, "No, you said jug first", and I go, "No, but jug's a terrible word. Stop! Stop!". And it's awful because you feel like "Oh shit! It's all gone out of control. It's crap, it's shit [...]" But actually because it's that first moment that impulsive moment, that uncensored moment, the true moment, and the moment when you're going "Oh no, my brain's just opened whoop like that", as opposed to when you're going, "Oh no lets think about the knife the spoon the fork and the rolling pin de de der [...]"

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Beavers Arts does not employ this method only in relation to words, but as a means of generating similarly grounded gestures or images.

GG: Quite often I do things based on gesture and movement, and you just pick movements you've liked from the day before and that becomes a language of gesture that has no bearing on the original context. [...] It gives you a richness to what you're doing, because you give people gestures that come out of something real. It's not like saying, "invent an action". [...] When you transmute it through another person that changes it and gives it a lot of richness. That's one of the reasons why we do a lot of copying.

(Interview, 19th December 1999)

Likewise, the content need not arise directly from the participants, but from any stimulus available to the artists:

GG: [...] Also in terms of producing a piece of work I'm just observing - everything that happens is fair game for using. [...] I'll take absolutely anything I see and create the show from that, if we're doing this sort of show, without making something so internal the audience can't watch it.

(Interview, 17th December 1999)

GG: I get lots of my ideas by reading and nosiness - I am a voracious gleaner....

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

It would be grossly inaccurate to suggest that this was some kind of random selection and that anything that passed before the eyes of the artists would suddenly appear in the show. What is significant, in my mind, is that while the artists, the writer/director in particular, filter and reprocess the information, the

manner in which the end product is achieved leaves its meaning firmly rooted and very genuine. In terms of the development of the group and of individuals within the group, this is also a very empowering means of working (see below) as it brings about a sense of ownership and a feeling of having created the show for themselves.

It was a similar process of reflection and reworking and recontextualising observation that led to a performance created with a group of young people in Mostar in 1996. I use this example as a clear illustration of how such methods of working can produce powerful and meaningful results.

Our June show was a fairytale, reflecting group improvisations and our perceptions of being in Mostar, in shadows, comedy, papercuts, lanterns and song. There was no reference to the war. It was performed to over a hundred people – local families, tough street kids, internationals.

“You have written the story of Yugoslavia” audience member

We are almost too shy to claim this quote (Gill, 1996, p.18)

It is through such practice that Beavers Arts achieved what Sellars states any artist must: that is to ‘get out of this voyeuristic thing of using art as a way to peep onto someone else’s keyhole and deal with the fact that it is a conversation.’ (quoted in Williams, 1996, p.17)

Actor and audience

A further aspect of that conversation is the interaction between the performers and their audience. It is through the development of this relationship that I will also illustrate the potential within theatre for addressing inter- and intra-group communication and thus forming a particular understanding of group

boundaries. The roles of actor and audience can be used to provide an opportunity to overcome the problem of becoming a closed group locked into a closed way of being.

It is common within Beavers Arts workshops for members of the group to be given the job of being an audience; a role that is taken seriously for what it can teach people as performers among other things.

GG: [...] and we make them be the audience. And I think being the audience gives you a lot of sympathetic notions about how to perform to an audience

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

The audience is accorded equal status with the performers, and their mutual dependence is emphasised by the artists:

SC: And in the theatre we don't think there's any difference between the audience and the performers - other than the performers have got a clue what's going to happen next

GG: if you're lucky

SC: if you're lucky

HH: [inaudible]

SC: it's not - there's not that division between us. It's an act, a joint act, an act which has to have those two elements in it, in order to be committed. It has to have an audience; it has to have actors.

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Gill talks of the contrast between Beavers Arts' approach and one which sets out to boost self-confidence in individuals at all costs. Many of Beavers Arts' sessions work on the notion of building confidence, but there is always a

balance preserved through according others the respect every individual demands for themselves. This equilibrium was sought in even the most basic exercises during the exchange project, and often realised through giving participants the task of being both performer and audience.

GG: [...] And I think what we do is something incredibly specific which says you can stand in the circle and have your moment of gaze and have your being, and the price for that is that you will let everybody else in the circle, including [name], including [name], and including the old bag [referring to herself], because we're all going to do it.
(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Such basic theatre exercises as “entering the space” (described above) can be powerful tools when managed well.

GG: I think also there's something going on with inclusion here, I mean the whole way that we work around the circle, notions of circle and inclusivity, and particularly the work we've been doing about how you regard other people – your gaze upon the audience and accepting their gaze on you[...]
(Interview, 9th January 2000)

This process was set in motion from the first workshop of the exchange. In a discussion following it, Gill explained to me some of the goals of that workshop.

GG: [...] and to start to introduce the idea of eye contact, of being able to look at other people. And what that's about is both increasing your confidence and making you look confident as a performer, which are two separate things.

Because obviously it's about just as a human being increasing your confidence, and also as a useful performer increasing your confidence. But as well as that it's to do with drawing strength from the group. It's a thing we do lots of which is looking at the people within your group.
(Interview, 17th December 1999)

The techniques employed on this occasion were deceptively simple, and involved such tasks as waving to people across the room, and looking at everybody in the group. I am not for one minute trying to suggest that by gathering a group of people in a room and asking them to wave at each other, they will suddenly regard each other in a new and respectful light. What I am proposing, however, is that within a context of a project that builds upon processes and skills from one day to the next and that generates a trusting and relaxed atmosphere, such exercises enable changes to start to take place.

In relation to the specific instance, these ideas are often made explicit to the group. Participants are asked, for example, to look positively on the group and to take strength from them, to rely on the people around them as well as to support them. However, this is done in a very low-key manner, rather than being flagged as a process by which to change your life.

The directors themselves, however, do hold these very explicit aims and long-term goals in mind. It is a question both of producing high quality performance and allowing individuals to develop themselves and their relationships with others.

GG: How by looking at other people you draw energy from them, and if you're afraid or worried about your performance you know that these are the people who will support you. So it is both group building in a general sense, and group building in a performance sense. Then what we are moving on to hopefully is the point at which people can look at an audience and draw strength from them, rather than drawing fear from them, and that's quite specific work we've been developing over the last few years

(Interview, 17th December 1999)

I am particularly interested in the translation of an approach to people from the specific instance to wider life experiences. It's an issue I raised in my follow-up interview.

AS: [...] You said something in a conversation I had with you about how all those exercises are teaching people about how to take strength from an audience rather than fear from them and that's exactly what we're talking about isn't it, it's how to see a group of people who could be seen as outsiders, who could be seen as a threat and to take something positive from them, rather than to take fear from them and to then be aggressive or...

GG: Which is finding a way of dealing with the world as well as a way of producing theatre, which engages an audience who then don't see the performers as a threat or alien or alarming. They see the performers as something charming and positive that they can then gaze upon, so it is a two-way gain and it does place a kind of compact or confidence.

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

The relationships between groups, between individuals, and between individuals and groups are addressed in many aspects of Beavers Arts' work.

I now go on to consider how theatre can be used as a means of distinguishing the particular within a group.

The particular and the group

GG: [...] My aim this afternoon is just to build on what we did yesterday, and for me to start to see the group as a differentiated group, not as a mass. And for individuals to see other individuals in the group. And I guess that's quite big aims for the whole project really, isn't it? To let people see each other and to see themselves. And to help on that process. You know ... and in a few days you'll not get a long way down that path. But, little steps, you know.
(Interview, 17th December 1999)

There were particular exercises used in *Walking through windows* that appeared to play a significant role in enabling individuals to (in the same kind of unconscious manner in which we make assumptions about others¹⁶) reflect upon themselves and others and their relationship to groups. One such exercise is a copying one. This involves every individual in the circle choosing another person to watch. The task is for each person to attempt to remain still, but nevertheless to copy any movement, however slight, of the person they have chosen. Thus the smallest involuntary movements become amplified until the exercise usually culminates in a frenzy of twitching, wobbling, jumping, and even falling over. As a participant not only is one focused upon the actions of another person, but one is keenly aware that one is the subject

¹⁶ See Chapter 4.

of another (unknown) person's attention. One is thus very aware of one's every action and temptation to move, as well as of the actions of others.

I discussed the use of this exercise with Gill following the workshop session. She explained how she feels the exercise is one of observation of self as much as it is of others:

GG: [...] the copying. That again has got several aims. One again is to do with observing - observing yourself and observing other people, because you are as much as anything observing yourself. You're ostensibly concentrating your eyes on the person at the other side of the room, but you are also observing how you copy their actions and..

AS: That was a difficult exercise...

GG: - brilliantly, and you're observing what you're tempted to do. It's less cruel than the comedy exercise that we sometimes do, where you actively copy someone and exaggerate their mannerisms. I wouldn't want to do that with this group - I think there are too many vulnerable people in this group, and too many people it would be very easy to humiliate [...]

(Interview, 17th December 1999)

While, it is not made explicit to the group, they are being encouraged to reflect upon themselves in relationship to others, and to explore their relationship to the other individuals/the group/the world. It is an opportunity to practice the skills of detailed observation, and of acting upon what is seen as opposed to what is preconceived.

As an illustration of the multiple and complex processes that might be taking place within one simple exercise, I return to *entering the space*, described

above, as an illustration of how this exercise can also contribute to developing the sense of the particular within the group. Gill explained in the follow-up interview how she feels that this exercise gives individuals a particular sense of group belonging that is inclusive while not engulfing.

GG: and they look at you, and you accept that gaze. I remember talking endlessly in previous projects about receiving that as warmth and energy [inaudible] and then you go "I'm [name]". So at that point of accepting all that it reinforces your sense of yourself, not your sense of yourself only as a part of a group. All that stuff about looking round the group and the people you've got, it's not about subsuming yourself in that bigger self, so it's not a kind of proto fascist thing where you go we are only an entity. It is about having the sense of self within that body.

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Preserving and recognising individuality forms an important part of Beavers Arts' group-building practice. This is further illustrated below, where I discuss the importance of recognising each person's particular contribution to the group in relation to their empowerment. However, the development of a group with fluid boundaries is dependent upon more than the recognition of particularity – there is a need for commonality. This forms the next subject of my discussion.

Common practice

In *Walking through windows* the commonality that assisted disparate individuals and groups to collaborate was made widely accessible through its founding on simple common practices. These were such that they could not

be identified as belonging any more to one person than another and that they were easily learned and shared. The group is thus defined around something transient and flexible rather than something pre-existent or given. It is, therefore, inherently non-essentialist. This is in contrast to a group where, for example, membership is defined by place of birth, and the division of who may or may not be included is clear-cut and unalterable.

Performance lends itself particularly well to the generation of common language and reference. In *Walking through windows* this was taken advantage of not only within the exchange group, but in uniting the different groups that collaborated in the final performance. As I explored above, the youth theatre and the exchange group relied upon shared exercises as a means of establishing acceptance in their first interaction. Likewise, both of these groups and the women's singing group, with whom neither group had previously worked, had all learned common songs. Again, these had the advantage of being relatively simple to learn (and therefore share), and of being in languages unknown to all the participants and, therefore, not seen particularly to belong to one set of people rather than another. Some of these songs formed a part of the performance, and although they were not necessarily jointly performed, they were recognised as shared. This was particularly so given that they are songs not widely known in general.

In the follow-up interview we discussed the final performance of the *Walking through windows* project and how this reflected the open nature of the group created. Of particular interest to the current discussion is the unplanned

participation in the show by two audience members, one a participant from a previous project. This seems to have been enabled by common practice, and the easily shared nature of that practice, as the following extract from our discussion shows:

GG...And what I do fondly believe, and I think it's true, is that we create groups which on the day of the show will embrace [participant in previous project] and say she is part of this group. 90% of the people had never seen her before when she arrived during their show and nobody, when she got up to do running like the wolf and sing the songs that she knew, was reacting as in "who is she and why is she joining in?"..

HH: that's true

GG: and they welcomed the kids in, and they welcomed the women from Loudmouth Women who don't really look that desperately appealing to a bunch of young groovy people

SC: they welcomed [name] who was a member of the audience who got up and joined in

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

It is, as I have stressed above, not only the participant's engagement with each other that is of importance, but also their engagement with those outside of the group. One way in which this is developed, as I demonstrate below, is through the participants' engagement as performers with an audience.

Being present

Beavers Arts work explicitly to enable those involved in their performances to "be present" on stage, to engage with the audience.

GG: [...] getting people to allow themselves to arrive on stage is one of our main aims. And the feeling that you get, when you get someone to arrive on stage who's not likely to arrive there (kids, scared people), it's not that I feel... - partly of course the bit of me that's a social worker at heart, or a socialist at heart, wants that for those sort of reasons - ... but it's not just for those reasons because, when someone does arrive, and you don't expect them, the weight they bring with them of sincerity, and depth, and performing ability is so gobsmacking[...]

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

The aims are thus both socially and artistically derived. In relation to the latter, it is this quality of being present that Beavers Arts believe is behind the strength of performance produced (and the stream of positive comments they have received regarding this) where the majority of performers have been inexperienced. As the directors went on to discuss, this can be attributed to the rawness of performance produced by people unhampered both by ideas of what they ought to be doing on stage and by performance technique. This perhaps is equivalent to genuine nature preserved in the personal, as opposed to the collective narrative, discussed in Chapter 5.

In terms of the social gains, these are not only a matter of improved personal confidence and awareness, but clear links are to be made between this capacity to relate positively to an audience, and the ability to be unthreatened by “outsiders”. In relation to the *Walking through windows* project, this was very much connected to the process of enabling a disparate group of individuals to live and work together as a group.

HH: and that [asking people to be present on stage] is the equivalent of saying, of asking people, to allow themselves to arrive in a place where they'll be part of an exchange. You see that happening - at the beginning of that week [names]

GG: they couldn't be there

HH: lots of people couldn't be there. They couldn't be in that space

SC: virtually couldn't allow themselves to be in the room

HH: they couldn't arrive there

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

This capacity to be present and thus to relate to others, is technique-based, and, as such, can be learned.

GG: It's a technique, but it's also quite an honest technique, not a trick technique, it's an honest technique for a way of dealing with people. And it's using any fear you've got to strengthen you, not using a fear to weaken you.

(Interview, 17th December 1999)

A technique it may be, but, Beavers Arts are clear, not one that can be developed by telling people to be open or by asking them to expose themselves.

GG [...] we ask people to be present - as present as they want to be - in the way they can be, whereas if you were in [a theatre company of which she used to be a member] you might have ended up in an extreme [name of company] show, with none of your clothes on, physically very exposed, very vulnerable, but in lots of ways very absented. I think I did a lot of [name of company] performances very absented, actually, because what was battling on within my head

allowed me not to be present with the audience even at the point I might have been stark bollock naked, clambering into their lap and screaming in their face. I think a lot of it allowed me to enter an enormous gulf between me and them, whereas in a Beavers show you might be sitting in the middle of the space in a nice little cosy chair with a cup of tea and all your kit on, and actually you are exposing far more of yourself in a more honest way to an audience [...]

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

The approach taken by Beavers Arts, is one of enabling rather than forcing. Through generating a climate of trust and confidence, people are encouraged to allow themselves to be as present and as open as they feel able. They are not pushed to reveal themselves. Not only is this indicative of the underlying ethos of Beavers Arts' work, but it appears to be the more effective method of achieving the desired results.

HH: *it's very... because I'm absolutely sure you would never get anybody to be that present on stage by saying directly to them "be present".*

AS: *"be honest"*

GG: *or "think about something dreadful that has happened to you and expose yourself"*

HH: *that's so frightening ..*

GG: *you put up all your barriers*

HH: *...and so terrorising people would never get there*

SC: *I think we hypnotise people into thinking it's easy. We say "all we want you to do ...", "we only want you..."*

GG: *"just stand there"*

SC: *"just with the lightest touch just walk on stage when you feel like it" and they go "am I*

feeling like it?" and "now I feel like it so I'll go up", and I do.

GG: And we give them the context of a community to support it - this is the group that you're in the context of, you have their gaze now give them the gaze back

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Whatever else the aims of the exercises and techniques employed, in *Walking through windows*, there was a continuous underlying drive to develop a safe environment founded on feelings of trust and care.

Trust and care

[...] the company manages to create a very relaxed and informal atmosphere in their practice, which allows the clients to enjoy themselves and gain trust and respect for the workers. (Clare Collins, 2000, unpublished BA placement report, University of Strathclyde, p.5)

Providing a safe atmosphere in which individuals are able to overcome feelings of fear is absolutely crucial to all aspects of Beavers Arts' work, whether performance or making. This was made quite clear by all three directors in the follow-up interview. Often, they agreed, this is achieved by making the task at hand seem simple.

SC: and it doesn't mean to say we don't value enormously the work that we do, or our skill, or what people produce, or we're not critical about what people produce, or any of those things, but there is no point in working with people who you can't get them past their fear block. You've got to be able to pull them past their fear block in order to get to the place where they can just give

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Without trust, Gill is convinced that nothing can work. The work, as the following interview extract demonstrates, is not, therefore, only a matter of making the workshops seem unthreatening and the work manageable, but in developing a wider climate of trust.

GG: So it is a complete circle, because if they don't trust you then it won't work. At which point they'll say I was right not to trust you. If they do trust you and it does work, they'll have been right to trust you. So in the end they will only trust you if you present yourself as trustworthy, even if they are people whose inclination has been not to trust. And I think that, if there's something in there about what we do, we spend a lot of time with the group persuading people that it's OK to trust us...

HH: which is why you end up talking about somebody's peptic ulcer and their medicine that they've just got and they can't understand what's on the piece of paper and you're being paid as a theatre facilitator

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

The ongoing and difficult process of developing trust depends upon generating the conditions in which it is possible to respect other people and learn to accept and like them. Beavers Arts live under no pretence that this is by any means an automatic outcome, as Gill explains:

GG: [...] You've just decided that he seems an extremely not very memorable young man that you've met a minute ago, and in a way you don't care about him, but by choosing to say I do care about him, you start to create the conditions in which you do start to care about him. So you're being operated on by that group as well. And there are people, there are always people you go "I don't much like them" and you let yourself

learn to like them. And it's what I said to you during the project, which is, certainly for directing someone, what I have to do is find what the thing is I can fall in love with in every single member of the group
(Interview, 9th January 2000)

One way in which this climate of mutual trust and respect is generated is through the recognition of the unique contribution every individual makes to the group. This is what I go on to discuss next as I explore the issue of empowerment.

Empowerment

[...] the group members should become aware that their unique talents have contributed to the development of a valuable project activity and also that the group's collective wisdom can be far greater than their separate contributions. (Waugh et al, 1998, p.7)

The manner in which Beavers Arts performances are generated lends itself well to demonstrating individuals' contributions to group activities. The development of material drawn from the group enables an on-going process of reference to individuals and the ideas and actions they have contributed. It is, as the directors explained to me, a continual process of acknowledging people's presence in a positive light.

GG: you're just going "let's just remind other people that..." - and I often do that and I know Susan often does it. I cast around, I cast around to say things like "I like the idea that Bertie [fictional character] had" when everyone knows that Bertie is actually a bit of a twit, but I try very hard to give credit [...]

SC: I like to give everybody credit because I think they...

GG: the group would be different without them

SC: And its about acknowledging people's presence. It doesn't matter how little people give or how much they give, it's whether they can give as much as they can. Sometimes people only give as much as they can and that's only a small amount

GG: sometimes you don't know how much that little bit cost them to give

SC: but it's like naming everyone everyday. I think it's really important to do things like

HH: Who's here?

SC: who's here, just say people's names, get other people to say everyone's names, going into the circle, looking in each other's eyes

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

However, for this acknowledgement to be of any value, it must be related to genuine contributions that can be recognised as such by the group. For this not to be the case is not only patronising to the individual concerned, but does not contribute to their being given the respect of the group. The focus, as Susan explained, is, therefore, on enabling every individual to give of his or her best.

SC: it's important for the group to do the best it can as a group. Which means the individuals in the group doing the best they can to fortify all the other individuals in the group.

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

To enable this to happen, Gill sees one of her roles (as a theatre director) as enabling people to reveal what those strengths might be. This, she says, is a process that begins from the very first workshop:

GG: And for me the other thing I was doing even with that first exercise, was just watching how people are, because, as a director from a theatre point of view, that's what you have to know - what do people look like when they perform, and what can you use of that?
(Interview, 17th December 1999)

Importantly, recognising an individual's contribution is also about acknowledging the particularity of that contribution. Each individual will have a different role within the group and bring different strengths to the group. This does not, however, mean people are of different value to the group. The directors of Beavers Arts are not shy to propose that not everybody is equally capable of doing particular jobs. Though, rather than dwelling upon what people are unable to do, the focus is turned upon helping individuals to recognise and draw upon their own strengths. Gill describes how it is decided, for example, whether somebody contributes mainly as a stage manager or mainly as a performer¹⁷:

GG: you encourage people to make choices that are not going to leave them doing something that disables them.
(Interview, 19th December 1999)

Empowerment is not always achieved through unrestricted choice, in the eyes of the directors. It is on these grounds that Gill is adamant that they, both as

¹⁷ There is no implicit hierarchy of different roles within the performance. Additionally, the inclusive ethos demands that all members of the group are visible and active as performers.

artists and as facilitators of cross-cultural exchange, should not assume a neutral or invisible role:

GG: [...] But I'd say don't be afraid to put your own vision in, because if I'm saying anything to the participants it's "be who you are, allow yourself to be present". So the one bit of real advice would be, as the artist who's contributing, don't try and take yourself out of the equation, because if you take yourself out of the equation you won't be present, you'll be dishonest. How will it ever work as a piece of work? If you obey the same rules yourself then you'll get a piece of work that's worth having. If you just try and sit there and go "well it's just the kids' work" - and I've heard this from a load of artists, "it's just the kids' work" - It'll be a pile of rubbish. Not because the kids are rubbish but because they haven't got the right tools.

(Interview, 9th January 2000)

When the balance between direction and choice is achieved and the unique contribution of individuals recognised, the experience can be an empowering one for all concerned. One participant commented favourably on this aspect of *Walking through windows* when he stated that it had proved to him that "theatre is made for everyone and everybody".

A reflection in the light of the above

I hope through the above illustration to have made clear the working practices and principles that in *Walking through windows* contributed to the building of an inclusive yet open group. In doing so, I have also presented the particular skills made available to participants, that may have contributed both to the

development of this group, and to their capacity to operate with more flexible non-essentialist conceptualisations elsewhere in their lives. I have explored the ethos and approach taken by Beavers Arts to their work and illustrated how this was translated into practice over the course of one project. As I began the chapter by stating, the exercises and techniques discussed are illustrative, not a blueprint for practice. While they may be conducive to the kind of practice one would like to develop, they are only tools and must be used with skill and sensitivity, as and when it is appropriate. Equally, every element that has been discussed above is only valuable in its relation to the others, as a part of a process that contributes to personal and social development. Good practice itself, although it may be founded on principles that can be shared and may employ tools that can be shared, is both personal and context specific. For this reason, I am not concluding the chapter, or the thesis, with a resume that sets out *the* answers.

Chapter 7: Towards a responsive practice

Having presented an intellectual journey through theory and practice, I now gather together that experience in a discussion of responsive practice. As the thesis draws to a conclusion, I aim to provide something concrete and useful to practitioners, whilst preserving the reality of my research findings, which support the notion that no formula for good educational or research practice exists.

Perhaps unusually, it is a cook to whom I turn for an illustration of the philosophy underpinning the discussion. Nigel Slater (2000) introduces his recipe-free cook book with the following instructions:

I want to encourage you to take in the spirit of the recipes that follow, but then to deviate according to your ingredients and your feelings, to understand that our ingredients and our hunger are variables that should not, cannot, be subjected to a set of formulas laid down in stone. I want you to break the rules. I want you to follow your own appetite. (p. 50)

As such, while the successful cook (facilitator of cross-cultural exchange, researcher...) can be taught which elements might unite in a successful combination, which tools can help work towards a desired outcome, and what might lead to disaster, this does not exonerate them from the need to apply their own intelligence and personality, and to reflect upon the particularities of any given situation.

Each egg, each steak, each potato is different and will behave differently in the pan. That is what cooking is about, and that is why it is essential to understand what you are doing rather than just mindlessly following a recipe (ibid.).

There is no replacement for the sensitive and intelligent practitioner. In addition to this, while rational thought, understanding, and direction appear necessary pre-requisites to success, a positive outcome also depends on that which is not so easily quantifiable – instinct, taste, feeling.

I believe a recipe should be treated as a living thing, something allowed to breathe, to change its nature to suit our ingredients, our mood and our desires. (ibid.)

This should not be perceived as a problem but as the very essence of good practice. Practitioners should not allow their practice to be pummelled into mediocrity by regimented guidelines and tick-boxes that crush innovation and inspiration. Equally, each individual should not be left to reinvent the wheel.

I begin the discussion with a summary of the last six chapters, reiterating the most significant aspects of my developing argument. Then, in the light of this, I explore the aims and benefits that commonly underpin cross-cultural exchange. I demonstrate them to be wide-ranging and not always easily recognisable. However, I make quite clear my commitment to the idea that cross-cultural exchanges should aim to reduce prejudice among participants. Importantly, and in contradiction to the contact hypothesis, I suggest that this should not be strived for through attitude change, but through enabling individuals to develop non-essentialist conceptual processes.

Following this conclusion, I then explore how it might be supported in practice. I call for a responsive approach to educational practice and evaluation. It should be congruent with the educational and social benefits sought, and dependent on sensitive and intelligent practice. Such an approach is itself an

on-going evaluative process, continually adapting and developing to reflect the particular circumstances.

I conclude by briefly exploring the broader context in which the study is located. I look both at the social and educational implications of my findings, and at the limitations of their scope. I also make proposals for future directions for research, and for educational policy and practice. I tentatively suggest that researchers, practitioners and policy makers alike could benefit education and the promotion of equality, through a responsive approach.

A review of the discussion so far

In the paragraphs that follow, I summarise in succession the first six chapters of the thesis, and identify the most significant issues raised and understandings gained.

In Chapter 1 I established my research intentions, both indicating the particular questions addressed and the framework within which the study was conducted. I showed the research to be a dynamic and responsive process that challenges essentialist conceptualisations through a dialogue between theory and practice.

I began with a personal narrative of the intellectual journey that brought me to conduct the research in the manner in which I did; making explicit the interrelationship between research methods, motivations, topic and findings. The narrative explored how the avoidance of research methods that I felt were incongruent with the research aims led me to establish a school-linking project

as a basis for gaining understanding about children's conceptualisations of identity. I demonstrated how the practice of this exposed and challenged my assumptions about cross-cultural exchange on such a fundamental level as to cause me to re-examine my motivations for the research and, ultimately, redirect its focus. It was on this basis that I came to study the theory and practice of cross-cultural exchange.

The background to the research thus established, I explored the complexity of human categories and the categorisation process. I began the challenge, sustained throughout the thesis, to rigid, essentialist conceptualisations of difference. I opposed the implicit assumption that single categories (such as those of "race" or "ethnicity") determine (or at least are more salient than) other characteristics. Through using ethnic monitoring as an illustration, I argued that, if prejudice is to be overcome, it is the *nature* of categories and of the categorisation process that must change. I concluded that any minimal increase in the number of categories into which we divide people brings us no further towards a solution. Likewise, assumptions about groups, whether positive or negative, if founded in essentialism, contribute to the perpetuation of discrimination.

I presented my preference for drawing distinctions along the lines of "culture" as opposed to "race" or "ethnicity", given its potential to be rooted to the practices of everyday life, as opposed to transcendental essences. In terms of exchanges, I showed favour to the term "cross-cultural" as opposed to "inter-cultural", believing it to allow a more suspended judgement of how difference

might be defined. However, I also made the point that it is the manner in which a term is employed, rather than the term itself, that is of greater significance.

Working from the assumption that one's worldview profoundly influences the form and topic of one's study, I set out in Chapter 2 the epistemological and ethical framework on which I based this study. I discussed the origins of rational scientific research and the challenges brought to it by relativism. The dilemma contemporary researchers face in the after-math of this thought revolution was next to receive my attention – while universalism is undermined, relativism, and its destructive, nihilistic tendencies, appears not to offer a foundation for a workable alternative. The way beyond this impasse, I proposed, is through a research process founded in a non-essentialist conceptualisation of difference; one that challenges dualism and, thus, facilitates a move beyond the universal/relative dichotomy.

I characterised research as a dynamic, non-linear process that, rather than being mechanically reproducible, is particular to both the researcher and all others involved in the research process. I argued that no rigid set of procedures can guide either research ethics or the research process itself, though both can, and must, be founded on well-developed principles from which to base context specific judgements. Within such a research process, rigour and honesty replace scientific objectivity, and the scrutiny of normative truths replaces the discovery of absolute truths.

On this basis, I stressed the need for a responsive research process, sensitive and flexible in its execution. Such a process develops according to the developing nuances of the research project as well as in response to critical insights, thus facilitating learning. As such, research is a dialogical process of negotiated meaning; both between researcher and collaborators, and theory and practice. A responsive approach, I proposed, should be supported by research methods that embody a process of collaborative action, where the research process is congruent with the broader principles and aims that the study seeks to promote, and mutual gain is sought.

Researcher involvement in such a process is personal and complex, and cannot be reduced to (or made neutral by) over-simplified assignment (of either the researcher or those collaborating in the research) to limited categories, as though these determine behaviour or experience. However, sensitivity to power dynamics within research relationships, and the capacity to empathise with others is, I argued, crucial. While I proposed that it is possible (and, indeed, necessary) for social researchers to represent others with different experiences and identities, I also argued that researchers should not attempt to speak *for* others.

It is in this context that I presented the two action research projects at the core of my dialogue between theory and practice, and introduced the methodological and ethical considerations that their implementation and presentation entailed. The principles guiding this responsive process are, I showed, derived from the motivations put forward in Chapter 1: that the

research must be valid, socially useful, and sensitive and respectful in execution.

In Chapter 3 I explored the educational context in which the research is presented, and laid the foundations for a future practice based on non-essentialist principles. I began the discussion by recognising the sometimes tragic consequences of group-based prejudice, and the ever-present need to overcome prejudice and associated discrimination.

Education, I showed, has long been believed to be an influential factor in social and cultural reproduction, but, in spite of this, multicultural and antiracist education seem to have achieved little beyond well-intentioned promises. In order to comprehend why this is so, and to work towards a more effective means of overcoming prejudice, it is, I argued, vital to understand the foundations of prejudice; the theoretical basis upon which it is conceived.

In accordance with the claims made in Chapter 1, I argued that it is the essentialist conceptualisation of difference – the vision of humanity as divided into distinct homogeneous groups – that is at the core of prejudice. I showed, that to my surprise, both universalism and relativism can be supportive of essentialism. Of greater concern, I also demonstrated how educational practices, whether embracing the values of multiculturalism, antiracism or of the New Right, can serve to reinforce essentialist conceptualisations of difference to negative effect.

From this point of view, if education is to contribute to prejudice reduction, it must embrace non-essentialist values, and use them as a force for change. It

must not, I contended, continue to attempt to teach people to have better attitudes towards groups, or to replace negative stereotypes with positive ones. It must be a continual process of overcoming essentially defined constructs and the constraints of racialised thinking. As such, education should be, I argued, a dynamic process that revolves around the development of skills. It should seek to enable people to develop the skills to actively and critically engage, and to be flexible in their understandings. This, I continued, is not something that people can be asked to do or taught about in theory. Instead it must become a part of unconscious daily experience and practice, embodied in every aspect of teaching and learning, from broad structures to personal encounters. Such goals, I showed, appear well supported by policy in Britain. However, while the rhetoric of the Blair Government's educational policies is encouraging, the translation from theory to educational practice is difficult, and the implementation process crucial.

I began Chapter 4, by considering the long-standing contribution of cross-cultural exchange to education, both in formal and nonformal settings. Such initiatives have received increasingly wide support, particularly in the drive for greater European cohesion. Much of the enthusiasm surrounding the benefits of cross-cultural exchange is, I showed, founded in a belief in the contact hypothesis. However, my main intention in this chapter was to explore a fundamental flaw in the notion that improved intergroup relations arise from the transferral of attitudes formed on an individual level.

As a basis of my critique of the contact hypothesis, I explored the processes of communication and categorisation and their interrelatedness. I concluded that in order to communicate we need to categorise and to make assumptions based upon those categorisations. However, I also demonstrated that such assumptions are made on a highly complex, unconscious level (though, in some circumstances, our conscious understanding may be so overpowering as to hinder this).

That cross-cultural exchange between individuals has a limited capacity to influence the attitudes of those individuals towards other groups has long been considered a flaw of the contact hypothesis. The fact that understandings about individuals do not tend to be translated to the groups they “represent” as wholes, has, I reported, led to measures to try and make this so. I argued, however, that this is neither realistic, nor a desirable educational outcome.

I maintained that, given the conclusions drawn about communication, prejudice and essentialism, if people are seen first and foremost as members of a group, and their other characteristics are perceived to be derived from that membership (as is the implicit assumption of the contact hypothesis), then identity becomes destiny, and prejudice is perpetuated. I demonstrated how cross-cultural exchanges operating with the over simplified understandings of communication and categorisation offered by the contact hypothesis, and sharing its implicit essentialism, have the potential to reinforce prejudice and reproduce divisions according to “race”. Likewise, I

demonstrated that evaluation, particularly in the form of attitude tests, has the capacity to reinforce essentialist conceptualisations of difference and, thus, undermine the aim of prejudice reduction.

However, the fact that the contact hypothesis is inherently flawed did not lead me to conclude that cross-cultural exchange itself is a worthless pursuit. I closed the chapter with the conviction that cross-cultural exchange can still be a valuable tool in challenging prejudice, but that it must do so by overcoming rather than embracing essentialism. The learning process, I argued, must not be one of attempting to change attitudes towards groups, but of enabling people to develop the skills to be flexible in their interpretations and assumptions. The teaching and learning, and evaluation processes themselves must be congruent with the aim of challenging essentialism, and should make manifest the complexities and subtleties both of cultural differences and of interaction. Guidance, for educational practice, thus I concluded, cannot take the form of a set of criteria to be fulfilled, but must be a flexible and responsive process.

I began Chapter 5 with an introduction to the *Celebrate!* project, the Internet-based cross-cultural exchange initiative through which the theoretical proposals of the chapter are developed and illustrated. This collaboratively generated project is one of a growing number of school-based initiatives benefiting from the opportunities for cross-cultural exchange afforded by the electronic media.

Perceptions of electronic communication are, I argued, so positive, that it could be believed that it provides a panacea for prejudice. I drew attention to the ardent praise electronic communication receives for its capacity to build a global society, and to enable people to communicate more freely and spontaneously, and with greater equality than in the physical world. It is perceived as a safe and neutral ground, where the lack of physical identity cues becomes an egalitarian force that enables individuals to be judged for what they say as opposed to who they are.

As I demonstrated, it is not only educationalists who have entered into speculation over this medium. Social theorists have pondered on the potential consequences of the qualitative differences between the nature of electronic communication and that of face-to-face communication. This, I recounted, has led to questions being raised over the potential challenge to human subjectivity posed by the mode of electronic communication. However, as I indicated, research evidence demonstrates that, at present, electronic communication (as is face-to-face communication) is firmly grounded in, and dependent on, the categories of the physical world. Indeed, in contrast to initial assumptions, the limited identity “facts” available in electronic communication, tend towards judgements being made on a less complex basis than in the real world. Whatever conclusions may be drawn, it is clear that electronic communication per se is not a panacea for prejudice.

Having thus recognised the limitations of electronic communication, I then turned to *Celebrate!* to give an illustration of how this medium might usefully

be employed as an educational tool. I showed how *Celebrate!* focused on contextualised personal experience as a rich means of demonstrating the complexities of cultural and religious differences, and the presence of difference *within* as well as *between* traditional categories. I also made explicit the emphasis on collaborative group work and peer tutoring as significant aspects of a learning process designed to enable individuals to reflect upon themselves in a broader context.

I concluded on a more practical note, with a focus on the realities of implementing a school-based project – from managing controversial material to coping with limited resources and integrating the curriculum. Finally, I commented on the potential for the future development of such initiatives. I made particular reference to the revised National Curriculum for England and Wales, and the inclusion of citizenship as a secondary school foundation subject from 2002. I welcomed the prescription-free nature of the new citizenship curriculum, and its promotion of flexible and responsive teaching and learning practices supported by a whole-school ethos. The only concern I expressed regarding the theory of the document, was with the perceived need to perform an outcome-based evaluation of a skills-based education; a challenge to which I previously referred in relation to the evaluation of *Celebrate!*.

In Chapter 6 I undertook a detailed analysis of the processes by which Beavers Arts worked to build an inclusive and flexible group, in the context of a residential cross-cultural exchange project – *Walking through windows*. I

made it clear that I would present an identification and exploration of the key principles that underlie their working practices, rather than a template for future replication.

I began by revisiting key methodological and ethical issues, highlighting the collaborative nature of my involvement in the project, and outlining the manner in which data is presented. Following this, I placed the project in its broader context. I introduced both Beavers Arts, the arts and education charity whose directors ran the project programme, and *Steps for Peace*, their ongoing European programme of which *Walking through windows* was a part.

I approached the analysis of the project first by presenting the sense of unity that was achieved by the disparate individuals and groups involved. I then set myself the task of challenging, in relation to practice, the notion (theoretically resolved in Chapter 4) that an inclusive group implies an excluded other. Equally, I challenged the idea that inclusivity implies homogeneity. While, in connection with this, I considered the importance of working with such a diverse combination of people as to generate complex interpretations of group difference, my focus was on the processes that formed the group rather than its composition. Also, I argued, it is significant that the unity of the group was founded upon its customs and practices, as opposed to something more rigid. As such, the group was able to be endlessly flexible and welcoming.

To identify significant process for further discussion, and as a means of introducing the style of work, I began with an illustration. I described, one scene from the final performance of the project, and explored the processes

that led to it. Significantly, *Emu World* entailed the collaboration of a diversity of individuals from two distinct groups. In the remainder of the chapter I presented a more detailed analysis of Beavers Arts' responsive working practice and the principles and ethos upon which it is founded. Though, before doing so, I drew the connection between the processes of responsive pedagogy and responsive research. Both, I argued, depend upon flexibility and sensitivity to allow for both minor on-going adjustments and more radical changes to plans.

The presentation of the processes relied upon illustration of the exercises employed. I showed how every aspect of the work must support the broader intentions of the project – from the manner in which people are introduced to each other, to the way the group stands (in a circle), to the processes and structures beyond the workshops. While I used exercises and techniques in an illustrative manner I also made clear how a single exercise might embody a complex blend of significant principles, and that the process of implementation is of even greater significance than the exercise or technique itself.

I identified the performance element of the project as particularly significant; seeing it both as providing a focus for work, and an instance of clarity in which many understandings can be made explicit. Once again, I emphasised the processes through which the performance was created as being significant. I showed how the content of the show was derived through a conversational process in which theatre becomes a means of reflecting (but not

appropriating) the experiences of others. It is a process founded upon what it observed, rather than what is presumed. I made clear the fact that this is not, and should not be, a neutral process, but is one driven by the skills and tastes of the theatrical director.

Performance, I demonstrated, offers opportunity to explore relationships within and between groups (often on an unconscious level). The relationship between the actor and the audience is one of mutual dependency. Central to Beavers Arts' practice is the enabling of individuals to be present in their performance, to accept the gaze of others, and to draw strength from those others without feeling threatened. Importantly, I showed the workshop processes to focus not only on the individual, but also on the individual within the context of a group. This implies each individual allowing every other the respect that they themselves are accorded by the group.

I identified that Beavers Arts' working practice is dependent on developing a climate of trust and care; one that enables people to participate through overcoming their fear, rather than forces them to do so despite it. In turn, I showed, this is dependent upon a process of empowerment; one that acknowledges the presence and unique contribution of every individual in a positive light, and enables those individuals (and, therefore, the group itself) to be shown to best advantage.

Exploring aims and benefits

Having reiterated the key issues raised in the thesis, I now go on to further explore the principles that I consider should underpin cross-cultural exchange.

I begin by considering, in general, the benefits sought from such initiatives, and then reiterate the importance I attach to challenging essentialist conceptualisations of difference. This sets the scene for a final comment on the educational and evaluation processes that reinforce this aim.

There is a large number of quite differing aims driving cross-cultural exchange in education, supported by an equally wide-ranging optimism for its capacity to meet those aims. Much of what is proposed is broadly supportive of personal and social goals that might lead to greater equality and justice in the world; sharing therefore the wider ambitions of the contact hypothesis' proponents, if not the means of achieving them. Williams (1996) is not unusual in holding the following beliefs:

Carefully planned exchanges can challenge stereotypes and help transform people's expectations of each other. They can also provide role models which can help people develop their self-confidence and a vision of their own place in society. (p.14)

European youth exchanges, for example, are recognised for their contribution to 'mutual trust, the strengthening of democracy, tolerance, a willingness to cooperate and solidarity between young people' (Europa, 1999). As such they are seen as crucial to the advancement of the European Union. Osler (1997) reports on research commissioned by the European Commission on the contribution of its Action Programmes in Education, Training and Youth (Leonardo, Socrates and Youth for Europe) to the development of active citizenship with a European dimension. She states plainly that Community action programmes can be a vital resource in the development of the skills necessary for such citizenship. The political motivations are clear.

Altruistic and egalitarian sentiments, however, are also at the core of what is paraded in the promotion of the latest European initiatives to support cross-cultural exchange:

Initiatives designed to encourage tolerance and the acceptance of differences, as well as measures combating all forms of exclusion, should be given specific encouragement and stimulation. (Europa, 1999)

In contrast to early contact initiatives, the European initiatives seek to overcome intolerance and discrimination on all grounds, and to generate an atmosphere of inclusion.

Efforts will be made under all programmes to include disadvantaged and disabled people, to counter racism, and to encourage equal opportunities for men and women. (Europa, 2000a)

However, economic incentives - the promotion of enterprise and preparation for work – are also evident as important aims for European initiatives. It appears that motivation for cross-cultural exchange is increasingly for economic as well as social development. Reding, in the forward to the new generation of programmes in education training and youth, makes the economic incentives clear.

Schools, universities, training colleges, small firms, large companies; all are having to adapt to the changes that our industrialised society is undergoing. The demand for computer literacy, language skills, mobility and innovation is increasing year by year, in every country and in every continent. (Europa, 2000a)

Given the focus of the thesis, my main interest lies in exploring the means by which cross-cultural exchange might promote prejudice reduction, while acknowledging the counter-productive nature of attempts to do so through

attitude change. Before doing so, however, I would like to acknowledge the existence of some of the other social and personal gains that arise from such initiatives.

Cross-cultural exchange, particularly if focused around a residential project, can have a powerful influence on individual's lives, as I will briefly illustrate. Personally speaking, my participation in such a residential project at the age of fifteen significantly altered the next years of my life, and influenced my educational and employment future. I know of others who say that participation in a particular project "changed my life". Equally, I cannot forget the words of a participant, talking of himself and his friend, at the end of an exchange project: "We don't know any decent people, do we? Well, we do now like".

The fact that outcomes such as these cannot easily be evaluated, and certainly cannot be quantified, should not diminish their importance. I believe that it is vital that educational aims are not reduced to those that can be measured, for the sake of being able to prove what has been achieved. This is an issue I raise again below as I consider evaluation.

Cross-cultural exchange has an important role to play in teaching individuals about themselves as well as about others. Indeed it can be argued both that judgements about other cultures must stem from individual's reflections on their own background (Zec, 1980), and that the dynamic process of self-identification is only possible through relation to others (Cockburn, 1998; Cohen, 1994). Clearly, understandings of self and others are interconnected.

The framework within which those understandings are conceptualised, and the implied interpretations of difference have significant implications for prejudice.

Importantly a new or critical perspective on oneself or one's beliefs can open possibilities for less rigid interpretations of others and their views.

The essential task in teaching "toleration" is to help people see themselves as individuals, and then to see others as such; that is, to make problematic that untaught, unexamined fusion of personal and group identity on which nationalist intolerance depends. For national intolerance requires a process of abstraction in which actual, real individuals in all their specificity are depersonalized and turned into carriers of hated group characteristics. (Ignatieff, 1999, p.70)

As I stated above, it appears vital that more complex understandings of others are enabled. This is in sharp contrast to the approach I criticised in Chapter 4, that proposes cross-cultural contact can only be successful in reducing prejudice if the individuals concerned view each other chiefly in terms of group belonging.

Once again I advocate an approach that provides individuals, not with one-dimensional views of others as split into homogeneous groups, but with a skill to make judgements and respond to a situation according to a set of egalitarian values.

As I made clear in Chapter 3, positive stereotypes, when founded in essentialism, are fundamentally as grounded in prejudice as negative ones. What must be strived towards is the capacity to look beyond stereotypes, rather than to generate positive ones.

Short, in 1993, made a strong case against the replacement of negative stereotypes with positive ones. 'For', he argues, 'to replace one form of prejudiced thinking by another (albeit a malevolent form by a benign one), is profoundly anti-educational.' (p. 163)

In order to challenge reductionist, preconceived conceptualisations of difference, people need to be equipped with the skills to interpret new situations flexibly, not to be given an equally rigid redefinition of the construct of their prejudices and stereotypes. Prejudice reduction can only occur if individuals are able to adjust their assumptions about other individuals from their original preconception; that is the individual becomes sensitive and responsive to each given situation. Therefore, as I argued in Chapter 3 the task is to teach people the capacity to actively engage and question (McLaren and Torres, 1999; Rattansi, 1992).

It may be that, in themselves, non-essentialist conceptualisations are of limited interest. However, the significant fact is that they appear to offer the only plausible means of challenging group-based prejudice and its associated discriminatory action (the ultimate goal of such educational initiatives). As I argued in Chapter 3, the problematisation of the essentialist concept of "race" is a prerequisite to good educational practice.

Thus, the challenge for educators is to generate an understanding of "self" and "other" in a way which, as McLaren (1995) writes,

[...] neither exoticizes nor demonizes the "Other" but rather seeks to locate difference in both its specificity and ability to provide positions for critically engaging social relations and cultural practices. (p.18)

It is commonly acknowledged, as I demonstrated in Chapter 4, that the only way in which one might achieve such a goal is through the transcendence of essentialist categorisations (Carlson and Apple, 1998; Gilroy, 2000; Reicher, 1986).

The point seems to be that neither total identity nor total difference can guarantee the construction of a truly equal other. (Larrain, 1994, p.32)

While, as I argued in Chapter 4, it is neither practical nor desirable to obliterate human categorisation or assumptions based thereon, it is possible, as McLaren (1999) puts it, to learn how to disidentify with binarisms. What cross-cultural exchange should seek to develop is a form of “democratic selfhood” as advocated by Carlson and Apple (1998).

[...] democratic forms of selfhood may be said to involve the recognition of difference but not in a bipolar oppositional manner with rigid “borders” or “boundaries” between identities. (Carlson and Apple, 1998, p.14)

Importantly, I want to state that it is the nature of the definition of the group that is significant, not its size (c.f. comments on ethnic monitoring in Chapter 1, and pan-European nationalism in Chapter 3). Likewise, (as I stated above in relation to the replacement of negative stereotypes with positive ones), it is not the assumption that is held about a group that is important, but the nature of the conceptualisation of that assumption. In my view, cross-cultural exchange should, above all else, strive to endow people with the capacity to be flexible open in their assumptions; to operate with non-essentialist conceptualisations of difference.

The principles of practice

Non-essentialist conceptual frameworks, clearly are not produced through informing people that they should think in a non-essentialist way. The development of such skills is through experience, through providing individuals with such experiences that enable them to reconstruct the framework of their thoughts and actions. This, as I argued in Chapter 6, should be both on a conscious and unconscious level. Through collaborative action, as I showed in Chapter 5, it is possible to embed difference in a context that facilitates complex understandings of difference and, thus, opens up the possibility of dismantling essentialist conceptualisations. Below, I explore the foundations on which educational and evaluation practice might overcome essentialism.

An integrated practice

In chapters 3 and 4 I reiterated the long-standing view that the learning process and the ethos of the learning situation must embody those values being promoted (see for example Allport, 1954; Fogelman, 1996). What I am in favour of is an approach that Albala-Bertrand (1997) terms *systematic wholeness*. Within the context of school-based education for citizenship, he writes that this implies all curriculum areas as well as the teaching style and organization of the school reflecting the values of citizenship. The same principle can be applied more widely. For example, Rattansi (1999) follows this principle in connection with the construction of boundaries as he puts forward his *reflexive multiculturalism*.

[reflexive multiculturalism] must incorporate in all its forms, whether in classroom materials or political interventions, an acute, constant and deconstructive attention to processes of boundary formation in social groups at all levels, from ethnic communities to academic disciplines. Reflexive multicultural education should strive to query disciplinary boundaries as well as enable students to engage with the artifice of boundedness when it comes to the discussion of historically constructed cultures. (p.105)

Significantly, Rattansi goes on to say, this continual critical process of boundary deconstruction does not imply ignoring the consequences, positive and negative of those socially constructed traditions.

It is not only in relation to the larger-scale structures or significant issues such as boundary formation that this idea applies. It is important that every element of the work is sympathetic to the skills and values being promoted. For example, the manner in which group work is approached, as I showed in Chapter 6, dictates the nature of the learning outcomes. The mere fact of working in a group does not necessarily result in collaborative group work. (Kaye, 1995)

The educational process appears equally important as the aims; a point I made particularly strongly in Chapter 6. Cross-cultural exchange, as Chapter 4 showed, seems to support educational processes that develop prejudice reduction (see also Tedesco, 1997 and Fogelman, 1996, on active learning). Vink (1999) feels that this is particularly so in the nonformal sector, given its less pressured learning environment, allowing for greater inclusivity, and a more democratic process that is responsive to the needs and potential of those participating.

Any educational strategy must strive towards *cultural relevance* through adapting to reflect the social context (Albala-Bertrand, 1997). This is so both in terms of the broader social and political context (Osler, 1997) as well as in relation to the very immediate context. To develop further the discussions in Chapter 6 of Beavers Arts' work, their method is to be present in a situation, to continually assess it and to work with what seem to be the best techniques within that particular context, at that particular time and to the desired end. Also, much depends on the skill, talent, taste, and personality of the person in whose hand the tool is held.

A personal practice

Through such a responsive process, a practitioner's response to a given situation will be a personal one, i.e. it will be shaped by their experience, skill and taste. Given this, Scurati's (1995) collection of attributes required by teachers of internationally sensitive education is of use. He states that these practitioners need:

a) cultural content (the knowledge and understanding of what one is going to teach); b) pedagogical content (the knowledge and understanding of the reasons why inter-cultural subjects are being taught and of the best techniques to do so); c) practical content (first-hand experience in differing local, regional, national and international contexts. (ibid., p.100)

While techniques might be simple and relatively easily learned, the complexity lies in their application, which requires experience and skill to be successful (Merry and Titley, 1999). Such sentiments are more widely shared by organisers of cross-cultural exchange:

Intercultural education is not a closed program that may be repeated without continuous modifications. On the contrary, not only is the range of possible intercultural activities very wide, but we also have to question continuously what we are doing and why. It is impossible to buy a magic formula which can guarantee us success. (Council of Europe, 2000j)

It was in interviewing the three directors of Beavers Arts that I was made aware of the fact that good practice cannot be abstracted from its practitioners. I was keen to establish how they might pass on their skills and expertise, and asked how they would train somebody else to do what they do. This, they were all adamant, was not something that was possible. As I argued in Chapter 6, not only does an individual bring a unique personality and set of skills but they have talent and taste. In the follow-up interview, it had been concluded that it was not possible to teach others to employ one's own practice, for the above reason, but I persisted that there must be elements of that practice that could be transferred:

AS: so there are tools aren't there? You can acquire tools...

GG: oh yeah

SC: what size of paintbrush did Picasso use? umm 4 mm...

GG: how do you make those lanterns?

SC: ...OK I'll go and get some, but it doesn't make you Picasso.

GG: no, but there is something [...] it seems to me it's right back to the beginning which is I would say: use any of our techniques or none of them, have a big group or a small group or neither of those, go to "foreign", stay at home [...], and then I would say, if you are directing this project don't be afraid to let your own vision intrude into the work. Be true to your

own vision and then you'll be true to what other people are giving you.
(Interview, 9th January 2000)

It is evident that, while techniques might be taught, and principles shared, it is only possible to enable an individual to develop their own method of working. Indeed, it is another defining feature of a successful method, that it is personal. It would actually be wrong to try and make one person do the same as another. As Gill concluded:

GG [...] well we do it the way we do it because we're us and we're very good at it. And then you're going well that's kind of not really that helpful, but at the same time I would not want to expunge that totally, because I would hate to suggest that if you follow the Susan Hilary and Gill method, tick the right boxes, you would come out with this solution - because I don't think you do put in the same ingredients and come out with the same thing.
(Interview, 9th January 2000)

Just as no two situations can be managed using the same selection of techniques, no two people employing the same techniques will achieve the same outcomes. It is first and foremost about engaging with other people as another person.

An evaluative practice

It is difficult to draw a clear distinction between evaluation and educational practice as I have defined it, for a responsive working practice is itself an ongoing evaluative process. This is both through the ongoing reflective process that accompanies action and brings about continual adjustment and

modification, and the more conscious, retrospective analysis of action (Leitch and Day, 2000). The latter relates to the more formal evaluation process, that I now go on to explore.

I would argue that evaluation is the most complex and taxing aspect of any programme. To be of a high quality, it must be implemented with the skill and sensitivity of the programme itself, and it must take account of the conventions of social research, and address the, perhaps disparate, concerns of the facilitators, participants, and funders of a project. Additionally, if the evaluation process is not to undermine the desired aims of the project under evaluation, then it must be congruent with them. The potential that evaluation has to be detrimental was made clear in Chapter 4 as I discussed attitude tests.

Evaluation can be seen to operate on three levels: *outcome*, *impact*, and *process* (United States Department of Education, 2000). An outcome evaluation explores the immediate, direct outcomes of a programme on its participants. Impact evaluations, on the other hand, identify more long-term outcomes of a programme as well as unanticipated effects. The last, process evaluation, focuses upon techniques and their implementation. Ideally, in my view, evaluation of a project should be a balance between the three.

There is, however, a tendency for disproportionate attention to be afforded to outcome evaluation. This is encouraged by evaluation guidance such as that given by Woolf (1999), that states that evaluation can only be effective if SMART objectives are set for a project. SMART objectives are those that are

Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and achievable within a Timescale.

Clearly SMART objectives do not complement the educational aims of cross-cultural exchange that I have defined above, nor could they account for the range of outcomes. Also an evaluation process defined around measurable objectives cannot do justice to the richness of outcomes, and the long-term impact cross-cultural exchanges can have.

Evidently, every cross-cultural exchange project will have different outcomes and will depend upon different processes for its success (see Chapter 4). Also, it is likely that unanticipated outcomes, and certainly unanticipated processes, will arise over the course of a project. An evaluation based only on preconceived notions of outcomes, thus, is unlikely to do justice to any project.

Given the above, I propose that evaluation, like educational practice, should be a responsive process, implemented in a manner suited to the particular project, and according to the particular skill, taste and understanding of the person conducting it. Evaluation must also be founded in ethical practice and should reflect the aims being sought in its implementation. Perhaps even more important than the need for evaluation to address immediate and long-term outcomes, is the need for ongoing evaluation of processes and outcomes to inform responsive educational practice.

Beyond the limits of cross-cultural exchange

Just as recent research on racial and ethnic divisions has drawn attention to the way in which such divisions exist at a number of layers within the social formation – from the structural, political and ideological through to the subcultural, interactional and biographical – so must any initiatives aimed at addressing these divisions be similarly “multilayered” in their approach. (Connolly, 2000, p.169)

It could quite legitimately be questioned, particularly given the discriminatory structures and policies with which society is imbued, that the gain to be had from cross-cultural exchange, however well implemented, is extremely limited in terms of prejudice reduction. I am in agreement with Connolly, that prejudice (and therefore essentialism) should be challenged at all levels. While I have argued that discussion of practice (in research or education) must be firmly rooted in the particular, I have also made clear that it must be founded in a broad conceptual framework. In this sense, the argument is applicable more widely.

The conceptual framework in which I have placed my study is that of non-essentialism. In research, in education, in society and as individuals, we need to develop the capacity to overcome rigid, preconceived division. We need to move from an understanding of categories as essential properties that are *determining*. People, therefore, must not be seen first and foremost as group members.

It is through the widely applicable principle of non-essentialism that this study moves beyond the discussion of good practice in cross-cultural exchange to put forward an approach to life and society. It is a principle that I argue should

be embraced at every level; both integrated into the practices of daily life and made explicit through conscious examination.

I am forced to put up a strong fight as, in these concluding sentences, I resist the temptation to put forward a set of practical steps, by which prejudice might be overcome; to provide a recipe. I console myself with the thought that the sustained argument throughout the thesis has contributed, in whatever way, to developing the art of cooking.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Pilot questionnaire

NB formatting is altered as the original was sent by electronic mail within the mail message.

Dear

This message contains a brief questionnaire about intercultural projects which I would be very grateful if you would complete.

Following significant participation in and organisation of such projects, I have become very interested in understanding more about them. I am currently studying for a Ph.D. in which I am comparing projects that happen over the Internet with face-to-face exchanges.

This is a pilot questionnaire and will form the basis of a more extensive survey. I hope that it is quite well refined already, but if you do come across any problems please let me know. Also if you have any queries about the research I would be happy to answer them.

I hope you will find the time to help me with this research. If so, please use the reply function to send me your responses.

Please rest assured that this survey is strictly confidential.

Thank you in anticipation, Alison Straker

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Intercultural Project Questionnaire

Please complete the following in relation to a recently completed project or project phase.

Your project

Project title:

Brief project description:

When was the project? Please describe over what period(s) of time the above activities took place.

What did the participants do on the project?

What were the project aims?

What, for you, was the most important aim of the project?

Participants

How many participants were involved?

Which countries were the participants from?

What age(s) were the participants?

According to what criteria were the participants selected?(ie do they represent particular groups?)

Communication

Which of the following methods of interaction did participants use as a part of the project (please mark with *).

telephone

fax e-mail

video conferencing

letters

face to face (eg exchange visit/meeting in person)

other (specify)

Which of the above was/were the main method(s) of contact?

What in your opinion are the main advantages of the chosen method(s) of contact?

What in your opinion are the main disadvantages of the chosen method(s) of contact?

Evaluation

How was the project evaluated?

In your opinion did the project achieve its aims?

What are the key factors you feel helped progress towards these aims?

What are the key factors you feel hindered progress towards these aims?

Would you organise another project with similar aims?

What positive outcomes did the project have in your opinion?

Do you feel that the project had any negative outcomes?

Your Involvement

What was your role in this project?

Did you do this as a volunteer?

Did you work on this project on behalf of an organisation?

If so, what is that organisation's main activity?

For how many similar (intercultural collaborative) projects have you been an organiser?

How did you first become involved in this area of work?

Further Information

If there are any further comments you wish to make please feel free to do so.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND INTEREST

Would you be interested in answering further questions at a later stage of this research?

Appendix B: Final questionnaire

Dear

This message contains a brief questionnaire about intercultural projects which I would be very grateful if you would complete.

I have devoted a significant amount of time (over the last ten years) to participating in and organising intercultural projects, and have become very interested in understanding more about them. I am currently studying for a Ph.D. in which I am comparing projects that take place over the Internet with face-to-face exchanges.

I am hoping for several outcomes from my research including an analysis of 'what's going on', the production of resources for practitioners, and a clearer understanding of the processes of cross-cultural communication. If you would like any further details please contact me.

Given your role as a project organiser, I understand that you will be a busy person. However, I hope you will find the time to help me with this research. If so, please use the reply function to send me your responses. (If you experience any technical difficulties, please contact me).

Please rest assured that any responses will be treated in confidence.

Thank you in anticipation,

Alison Straker

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University of Newcastle

St Thomas's Street

Newcastle-upon-Tyne

NE1 7RU England

Email: Alison.Straker@ncl.ac.uk

Intercultural Project Questionnaire

Please complete the following in relation to a recent project

Project title:

Project aims:

What do you think was the most important aim of the project?

What did the participants do on the project?

When was the project? (Please describe over what period(s) of time the above activities took place)

On average, for what period of time was each participant involved?

How many participants were involved? (please mark with *)

10 or less

11-20

21-30

31-50

51-100

101-500

501-1000

more than 1000

Approximately how many people did each participant have the

opportunity to interact with? (please mark with *)

10 or less

11-20

21-30

31-50

51-100

101-500

501-1000

more than 1000

How many countries were the participants from? (please mark with *)

1

2

3-5

6-10

11-20

More than 50

How many continents were the participants from?

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

What age(s) were the participants?

According to what criteria were the participants selected?

(ie do they represent particular groups?)

Which of the following methods of interaction did PARTICIPANTS use
as a part of the project (please mark with *).

telephone

fax

e-mail

video conferencing

letters

face to face (eg exchange visit/meeting in person)

web site

other (specify)

Which of the above was/were the main method(s) of contact?

What in your opinion are the main advantages of the chosen method(s) of contact?

What in your opinion are the main disadvantages of the chosen method(s) of contact?

What methods were used to evaluate the project?

In your opinion did the project achieve its aims?

What are the key factors you feel helped progress towards these aims?

What are the key factors you feel hindered progress towards these aims?

Would you organise another project with similar aims?

What positive outcomes, if any, did the project have in your opinion?

What negative outcomes, if any, did the project have in your opinion?

What was your role in this project?

Did you do this as a volunteer?

Did you work on this project on behalf of an organisation?

If so, what is that organisation's main activity?

For how many similar (intercultural collaborative) projects have you been an organiser?

How did you first become involved in this area of work?

If there are any further comments you wish to make please feel free to do so.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND INTEREST

Would you would be interested in answering further questions at a later stage of this research?

Would you like to receive a summary of my findings?